

The Blue Coat School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104704
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	308654
Inspection dates	20–21 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Angela Milner HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	930
6th form	322
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Chris Hallows
Headteacher	Mr Michael Tittershill
Date of previous school inspection	8 June 2004
School address	Church Road Liverpool Merseyside L15 9EE
Telephone number	0151 733 1407
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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 Coat School is a smaller than average selective co-educational school which has had mathematics and science specialist status since September 2007. Students come to the school from across Merseyside. It is a stable school with a lower than average percentage of students entitled to free school meals. Students from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds currently represent around one-fifth of the school's population. The proportion of students for whom English is an additional language is lower than average. There are no students with statements of special educational need and fewer than average students who need help with their learning. Awards achieved by the school include the Healthy Schools Award, Sportsmark, the Gold Award for a non-smoking environment and Investors in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Blue Coat School is a good school with outstanding features. It provides an inclusive environment where all students are able to flourish. Students and staff feel valued; they enjoy and appreciate what the school has to offer. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire were positive in their views of all aspects of the school. Although the school periodically seeks the views of parents and students and considers these when making decisions, a small minority of parents feel that consultation could be more regular and widespread. Inspectors judged that students were capable of taking on more responsibility in relation to school decision-making and developments.

Students are selected for entry to the school on ability so the attainment on entry is well above average. Students make good progress from their initial starting points and achieve well. They reach exceptionally high standards. In the drive to continue to improve standards further the school sets challenging targets linked to high expectations. Rigorous data analysis takes place to identify any underachievement. Individual mentoring for a group of Year 11 students and a number of effective intervention strategies are used to boost achievement.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students become mature and self-confident young people with a strong community conscience.

Relationships throughout the school are excellent. Students commented positively on the willingness of teachers to give them help when they need it. Students' behaviour is exemplary both in and out of lessons. They enjoy school, participate in the life of the community and their attendance is well above the national average. As a result, students develop very positive attitudes to learning. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a substantial strength and contributes to the distinct sense of community within the school. Students are well prepared for their future economic well-being through enterprise education activities, work experience in Years 10 and 12 and the excellent support they receive to prepare them for university and their future careers.

The majority of teaching is good and a small proportion is outstanding. Where teaching is motivating, well planned and well paced students make good progress in their learning. When teaching lacks this focus or students are not encouraged to think for themselves in lessons then progress is less than it could be. There are too few opportunities for students to learn how to work independently. Although the setting of targets and assessment procedures are good, there is some variation in the quality of marking between subjects. Students know their current levels and targets, but feedback from teachers does not always inform them exactly how to improve their work.

The academic curriculum offered is broad and well matched to the needs of students. It is enriched by an impressive range of extra-curricular activities. The school has recently been designated a specialist mathematics and science college. While it is too soon to measure the impact of this newly designated specialist status, the vision and potential for the future are evident.

The headteacher and senior staff provide good leadership and management of the school. They have successfully promoted an extremely positive ethos, a real sense of community and positive relationships amongst staff and students. The governing body effectively holds the school to account. Systematic self-evaluation and good use of data mean the school can identify its strengths and the areas it needs to improve. The school has dealt well with the issues raised in

the last inspection report. Senior managers have a clear vision for the future of the school and there is good capacity at all management levels to bring this about.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

This is a good and improving sixth form. Students and parents speak highly of the teaching, support and guidance provided. Students feel well supported when they enter the sixth form, during their studies and as they prepare for transition to higher education and/ or the world of work. The good pastoral and academic tracking system enables progress to be monitored effectively. Students achieve well and attain high standards in public examinations. Students benefit from an academic curriculum that suits their needs and aspirations for higher academic study. In 2007 five students were offered places at Oxbridge. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects and provide good quality teaching. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and to work increasingly independently. The majority of students take part in an extensive variety of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, which help them to develop a range of skills to support their future lives beyond school. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Retention rates are high as a result of good sixth form management, the strengthening of tutorial provision and the high levels of support and academic guidance provided. Sixth form students make a significant contribution to the life of the school and the wider community and act as role models for younger students in the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the opportunities for students to learn independently.
- Ensure consistency in the quality of marking so that students know exactly what to do in order to improve their work in all subjects.
- Increase the levels of student participation in the school's decision-making and development processes.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enter the school in Year 7 with well above average attainment. Standards are consistently and exceptionally high in both key stages and in the sixth form. Students make good rather than outstanding progress overall because there are variations in the overall good quality of teaching. Standards have been high for many years and show an improving trend. Results in national tests at Year 9 and examinations in Year 11 are impressive. In 2007 the proportion of students achieving Level 5, the standards expected for their age, was 100% in English, mathematics and science. Furthermore, a high proportion of students gained Level 8 in mathematics and Level 7 in science. In 2007 the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics was 100%. Almost three-quarters attain the highest grades in their examinations. In the sixth form standards are exceptionally high and are also improving year by year. Approximately two-thirds of students who take A2-level examinations gain passes at the higher grades of A and B. Students make good progress during their time in the sixth form. The vast majority of students continue their studies at university.

There is no significant variation in standards between different groups of students. Students of different abilities and backgrounds including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well. The majority of students with gifts and talents are challenged appropriately.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development and well-being of students at this school are outstanding. Their attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning are exceptional. Students feel privileged to be at The Blue Coat School. This is reflected not only in lessons but also in high participation rates in the wide range of extra-curricular, social and cultural activities, visits and trips abroad. Students have an understanding of and commitment to healthy lifestyles. They participate in physical education lessons and extra-curricular sports activities. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. This is provided through an effective assembly programme, religious education and other lessons across the curriculum. The discrete programme for citizenship helps to develop students' understanding of, and prepare them for, their future roles in society. They also benefit from a programme of enterprise and work-related learning. There is, however, scope for greater development of more independent learning and thinking skills.

Students have a clear sense of belonging to the school community, and of contributing to the wider community. An example of this is the weekly charity collection, with the students themselves, choosing charities to support through their Social Services committee. Students have the potential to make a greater contribution to school decision-making processes.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Very good relationships are a hallmark of all lessons and students' behaviour is always excellent. In the best lessons, all students are challenged and a variety of methods are used to ensure that students become fully engaged in their learning. This means they make good progress. In these lessons, teachers share with students the intended learning outcomes and there is a brisk pace through a number of motivating activities. However, in some lessons there are insufficient opportunities for students to think about what they are learning, to do their own research or to work independently. In these lessons, students passively take in information and as a result their progress is slower. A range of strategies is in place to improve teaching and learning, but the quality of lesson planning varies greatly and the implementation of the school's policies is inconsistent across departments. Although the quality of teaching has improved, the monitoring of lessons is not yet sufficiently robust or consistent enough to ensure that weaker practice is tackled. The marking of students' work is inconsistent and feedback from teachers does not always help students to improve their work. There is not yet a clear and shared understanding across the school of what constitutes outstanding teaching and learning. Nonetheless, recent initiatives to share best practice are having a positive effect.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides a good curriculum, which caters for the needs of students and meets statutory requirements. In Years 7 to 9, students can pursue separate science courses and two modern foreign languages. A broad range of academic courses is provided at Key Stage 4 and students are entered for ten GCSE's with plans to increase this to twelve next year. All students follow a common core of subjects including, information and communication technology and a modern language and can choose from a wide range of optional subjects. The core curriculum includes only one hour a week of physical education, but many students are involved in sports clubs and teams. In the sixth form, there is an extensive programme of twenty-two advanced level courses. An extensive variety of extra-curricular activities and visits enriches the curriculum and a range of sports and arts activities enables many students to develop individual talents and to contribute to the life of the school and the wider community. Specialist college status is beginning to strengthen links with primary schools, enabling specialist staff to provide subject expertise and resources in science and mathematics. Work-related learning is an outstanding feature of the good curriculum and prepares students extremely well for future higher education and a range of careers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support provided are good. Students appreciate the commitment of staff to encouraging their enjoyment and achievement. Students feel safe and secure and know that there is always someone to talk to if they are having problems. Those who have particular difficulties are very well supported. Where appropriate, individual arrangements are made to meet their additional needs. This includes the provision of support from the local authority and external agencies as well as from the school's own learning mentor. Enrichment programmes are in place to enhance the development of students who are especially gifted and talented.

Recent restructuring in senior management roles has led to a greater emphasis on overseeing, monitoring and supporting students' academic progress and achievement. The school recognises that form tutors could play a greater role in the provision of care, guidance and support. The school meets all requirements for the safeguarding of students and has clear policies in relation to equality and discrimination.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good at all levels. The school is well led and managed by a headteacher and management team who provide a clear vision for the school. Middle managers play an active part in shaping school policies and developments. The headteacher has ably guided the school through a period of significant change involving the

establishment of co-educational provision and the extensive rebuilding and refurbishment of the school, whilst maintaining and improving overall provision. After many years of dedicated service to the school, he has ensured that procedures and structures are in place to secure the school's continuing development in the future. Rigorous review, monitoring and evaluation ensures strengths and areas for development are identified. As a result, development planning is well informed and findings are used effectively to provide appropriate professional development for teachers. Some of these structures and systems have not been in place long enough to impact on provision and outcomes, but they do demonstrate the school's good capacity to make further improvements. Resources are efficiently managed and deployed and the school provides good value for money.

Governors challenge and hold the school to account, whilst recognising that the day-to-day running of the school is the responsibility of the headteacher and senior management team. Statutory requirements are fully met and there is a strong commitment to equality and inclusion. Specialist school status, though in its early stages of implementation, is being well managed to the school's advantage.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
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	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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	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?	2	2

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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

Inspection of The Blue Coat School, Liverpool, L15 9EE

Thank you for the contribution you made to the recent inspection of your school. You made the inspection team feel so welcome and we enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking with many of you and your teachers. We were impressed by your ability to work hard and achieve high test and examination results, your sense of responsibility and how proud you are to be part of The Blue Coat School community. You play a large part in making your school so good. Many of your parents completed questionnaires. This meant we were able to consider their views during the inspection.

Your school is providing you with a good quality of education. It offers you excellent opportunities to gain the skills and qualifications that will help you to succeed in life. You have excellent relationships with your teachers and with each other. We know you appreciate the support and advice you receive from them. We think that most of the teaching in your school is good. The school and sixth form are well led and managed and your headteacher, governors and teachers have worked very hard to improve the school since the last inspection. Whilst we have judged your school to be good with outstanding features there are three areas we have asked the school to improve further. We would like the school to:

- extend the number of opportunities provided for you to learn independently
- ensure marking helps you to understand exactly what you have to do in order to improve your work
- provide more opportunities for you to participate in school decision-making and developments.

You can all, of course, help to improve your school further by continuing to work as hard as you can to achieve your best in tests and examinations, by taking greater responsibility for your own learning and by becoming increasingly involved in decision-making and developments in the school.

Thank you again for your help in this inspection and we would like to wish you all the very best in your studies and every success in the future.