

The Blandford School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113888
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	311420
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter Sanderson HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1187
6th form	193
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Rix
Headteacher	Sally Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	6 October 2003
School address	Milldown Road Blandford Forum DT11 7SQ
Telephone number	01258 451121
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The Blandford School is a larger than average secondary school. It has increased significantly in size since the last inspection due to its expansion in 2005 from a 13 – 18 upper school to an 11 – 18 secondary school. The school currently operates on two sites that are five minutes walk apart. Most students are of White British heritage and the number of students whose first language is not English is well below the national average. The number of students eligible for free school meals is below that found in most schools. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to the national average. The school includes specialist provision to support students who have been diagnosed with dyslexia and there are currently two students on roll. The school achieved specialist status in technology in 2003.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Blandford School provides students with a good education. It is a friendly, calm and purposeful place in which staff work tirelessly to promote students' well-being. As one parent said, 'Staff are dedicated and committed to the education and welfare of our children.'

Students' achievement throughout the school is good. Standards at the end of Year 9 have been consistently above average for a number of years. Standards at the end of Year 11 were average in 2007, with variation in achievement between different subjects. Robust tracking of students' progress linked to effective mentoring programmes have brought about improved standards in the current Years 10 and 11 and they are now above the national average. The good rates of progress across the school are sustained by the good quality of teaching and learning. However, there is variation in the quality of teaching and learning between subjects and this accounts for the variation in achievement. In some lessons, teachers do not ensure that activities are well matched to the ability of all students, particularly the most able. The good curriculum provides students with a broad and balanced range of options and opportunities for enrichment. The school has extended the range of vocational courses offered to students well in recent years through collaboration with local schools. The school rightly prides itself on its inclusiveness. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. The behaviour of students in lessons and around the school is good and relationships with each other and with staff are harmonious. Students convincingly assured inspectors that the school deals effectively with any anti-social behaviour, including any signs of bullying. Students feel safe in school and secure in that there is always someone to turn to, from teachers to the student support worker, if they have concerns. They enjoy school and are proud of the recent improvements to the school buildings. Attendance is average and improving. Most students are very active participants in sport and many enjoy the healthy menus in the canteen. The leadership team is very effective in seeking and responding to students' views through the active year councils and the school parliament.

The headteacher leads the school extremely well. She has provided clear and purposeful leadership through a time of significant change for the school. Throughout this period, she has maintained a clear and relentless focus on improving students' achievement and promoting high standards of personal development. She is well supported by the school's leadership team. Excellent systems of self-evaluation are in place and members of the leadership team know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. Where improvements are needed, as recently in improving achievement in Years 10 and 11, they take robust action. School improvement plans are very clearly written and put into action diligently, so that they have a positive impact. Middle leaders manage their areas of responsibility increasingly rigorously and are clear about where improvements are needed. They are well supported by effective professional development programmes and by the strong culture of self-evaluation that pervades the school. While there are examples of very good practice, the quality of middle leadership varies across the school.

The school's specialist status in technology has brought significant improvements to the provision for information and communication technology (ICT). Teachers and students regularly use ICT in lessons and this is having a positive impact on students' motivation and learning. The school works very effectively with partner primary schools to ensure a smooth transition into Year 7. It also works well with local businesses to improve the learning experience for students.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school is successful in recruiting students to the sixth form and in supporting them to complete their courses successfully. Standards at the end of Years 12 and 13 are average and improving. Students make good progress in their learning given their attainment at the start of Year 12. However, there is variation in achievement between different subjects.

A good range of A-level subjects is offered, plus a variety of one-year vocational courses. New subjects have been introduced in response to students' requests. Teaching and learning are good. Support and guidance to help students move on to the next stage, for example to higher education, are a strength of the sixth form. There are robust systems for target setting and tracking students' progress and these are having a positive impact on rates of learning. Staff know the students well and give them good individual support. Students enjoy their learning, feel they are listened to, have good opportunities for personal development and make a positive contribution to the community of the school.

The leadership of the sixth form, with contributions from a range of school leaders, is good, and management is a strength. The capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that lessons contain suitably challenging activities for all students, particularly the most able.
- Reduce the variation in student achievement between subjects by widely sharing the good and better teaching and learning practice that is present in the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students make good progress during their time at the school. They enter the school with standards that are broadly average. Standards at the end of Year 9 have been consistently above the national average for the past few years. Standards at the end of Year 11 were slightly above the national average in 2005 and 2006 although they fell to average levels in 2007. The GCSE results obtained by Year 11 students in 2007 indicated that there was a relatively large variation in achievement between different subjects. For example, students made very good progress in mathematics, achieving the school's specialist school target in this subject. However, progress in technology was only satisfactory and the school's specialist school target in this subject was not achieved. The school's effective tracking system and inspection evidence indicate that students are making good progress in the current Years 10 and 11 and standards are above average. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in their learning due to the effective support they receive. All other groups of students make similar, good progress.

Students with a wide range of abilities are admitted into the sixth form. Standards at the end of Years 12 and 13 are average, although they are rising. Students make good progress in their learning during Years 12 and 13 and, given their attainment at the start of sixth form courses, they achieve well overall. As in other year groups, there is a relatively wide variation in student achievement between subjects although they tend to achieve better on vocational rather than academic courses.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school's strongly positive ethos and very effective relationships contribute significantly to students' good personal development and well-being. Most enjoy school and are keen to learn, especially when their lessons are lively and interesting. Levels of attendance have recently improved to the national average and this is a continuing and relentless focus for the school. Behaviour both in lessons and around the school is good, although a few parents expressed concerns about low-level disruption in some lessons. Students say that they feel safe around the school and they appreciate the peer-mentoring scheme where older students have been trained to support others. Students respect the school buildings and they are largely graffiti free. The school parliament is a strong and vibrant force and complements the year councils in giving students the opportunities to make their voices heard. Most appreciate the school's messages about healthy lifestyles and many take advantage of the healthy food choices available to them.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Although there are limited opportunities for spiritual reflection, many benefit from being involved in fund raising and visits both in this country and abroad. Students make a good contribution to the community. Some are involved in visiting pupils from partner primary schools or working with community organisations, and many take part in extra-curricular activities such as sport and productions in dance, drama and music.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students make good progress because of good teaching and learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this well to plan lessons around clear learning outcomes. They have positive relationships with their students, creating a good climate for learning, and behaviour is managed well. In lessons where teaching is good or better, work is well matched to the needs of all students. The most able students are challenged to achieve highly and consequently make good or better progress. However, in some lessons work is not well matched to students' ability, particularly the most able. The leadership team is focusing on helping teachers to develop good questioning, and this is beginning to have a positive impact on learning. Where teaching is outstanding, teachers are able to build on students' responses to questions and take their understanding to a higher level.

The school pays careful attention to what students say about teaching and learning. Students rightly feel they are taught well and they particularly enjoy lessons that are imaginative, actively involve them in learning and proceed at a good pace. Most lessons they receive are of this standard. However, in some lessons, the teacher's talk predominates and these are less successful in engaging students and promoting good learning. There is good assessment of students' work. Most teachers give students helpful guidance on what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum appropriately reflects the school's specialism in technology and meets the needs and aspirations of its students well. A good choice of both academic and vocational courses is provided to students in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. This range of courses is extended through the good partnerships that exist with other local schools and training providers. The school monitors the impact of the curriculum on its students well and listens and responds positively to students' and parents' requests for new courses. For example, in recent years new courses in dance, Spanish, music technology and drama have been introduced. The school has good plans to further develop the range of vocational courses offered to students.

Students are offered a wide range of enrichment activities through after-school clubs, trips, visits abroad, performances and activities week. These activities are well attended and make a positive contribution to students' good personal development. Students are well prepared for life beyond school through an effective personal and careers guidance programme and there are good links with external agencies to support this.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Procedures for ensuring students' safety are robust, with good staff recruitment arrangements and clear safeguarding practices. Students speak highly of the support arrangements in the school and tell the inspection team that they feel safe, valued and respected and that adults deal effectively with any bullying if it occurs. Assessment data are analysed and distributed to ensure that leaders and managers can closely track individual students' progress, and the programme of academic mentoring is good. Although these data are used well by many teachers across the school as a focus for raising achievement, this practice is inconsistent.

Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and this allows them to match the progress made by other students across the school. All elements of the student support structure mesh together well to ensure that students receive good care and support throughout their school career. Particularly strong features include the school's multi-agency liaison with health and social services and its outstanding arrangements for transition to the school.

In the sixth form, where care, guidance and support are also good, students value the commitment of their teachers, and speak highly of the school's target setting and tracking procedures. Guidance given to them in deciding future pathways is comprehensive and effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher is an exceptionally able leader. The clarity of her vision and the determination with which she develops and applies key policies are at the heart of the effectiveness of the school. She is well supported by a senior leadership team whose skills are complementary and

who provide effective coverage of the key management tasks. There are some very good middle leaders, although overall middle leadership and management vary in effectiveness. However, they are improving because of the quality of the monitoring and support activities of the senior managers. The senior leadership team rigorously monitors students' achievement and the quality of teaching and learning. A robust system of reviewing the work of subject departments is in place. These excellent systems of self-evaluation ensure that senior leaders and governors have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Challenging targets are set and these are used well to plan improvement. The issues raised by the previous inspection have been addressed and effective action being taken by the leadership team is improving students' progress in Years 10 and 11. This demonstrates that the school has good capacity to improve. Financial management is good. Resources are well managed with a clear focus on value for money. Governors actively review the way they fulfil their responsibilities, and as a result are effective in setting high expectations and providing support and guidance.

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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	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	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?	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	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	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

18 January 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of The Blandford School, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 7SQ

On behalf of your inspection team, I would like to thank you for the warm welcome you extended to us during the recent inspection of your school. We very much enjoyed our discussions with you. We thought you would like a summary of the inspection findings, but also hope that you will take the opportunity to read the whole report.

- We believe that your school provides you with a good education.
- Your headteacher leads the school extremely well and she gets good support from other senior staff in the school.
- The school has some excellent arrangements in place to ensure that your move from primary school into Year 7 was as smooth as possible.
- You are taught well and so make good progress in both the main school and the sixth form.
- You get on well with each other and your teachers.
- The vast majority of you behave well both in lessons and around the school.
- You told us that you feel safe in school and that bullying is rare but, if it does occur, it is dealt with well by staff.
- You have a good range of both academic and vocational courses to choose from in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form.
- You told us that you appreciate the good range of after school clubs, trips and visits provided by the school.
- You have all benefited from the school's specialism in technology.
- Although your school is good, it could become even better and we have identified two areas for improvement.
- In most of your lessons teachers plan activities that provide some challenge for all of you including those of you who are capable of achieving the highest levels or grades. We have asked the senior teachers in the school to ensure that this is the case in all of your lessons.
- Although teaching in the school is good, it is better in some subjects than others. We have asked senior leaders to ensure that teaching is as good as the best in all areas of the school so that you achieve extremely well in all of your subjects.

I wish you well and look forward to hearing good things about you all in the future.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B

18 January 2007

Dear Students

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Dorset DT11 7SQ**

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- You have all benefited from the school's specialism in technology.

Although your school is good, it could become even better and we have identified two areas for improvement.

- In most of your lessons teachers plan activities that provide some challenge for all of you including those of you who are capable of achieving the highest levels or grades. We have asked the senior teachers in the school to ensure that this is the case in all of your lessons.
- Although teaching in the school is good, it is better in some subjects than others. We have asked senior leaders to ensure that teaching is as good as the best in all areas of the school so that you achieve extremely well in all of your subjects.

I wish you well and look forward to hearing good things about you all in the future.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector