

The Blue School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123892
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	340452
Inspection dates	26–27 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Christopher Russell HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1432
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	187
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Spencer
Headteacher	Stephen Jackson
Date of previous school inspection	17–18 January 2007
School address	Kenion Road Wells BA5 2NR
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Forty-four lessons were observed, taught by 43 teachers; there were also a number of briefer visits to lessons. Meetings were held with students, staff and governors. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation, 346 questionnaires completed by parents, and questionnaires completed by staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- whether students' attainment and progress are declining
- whether the school's provision, particularly teaching and the curriculum, meets the needs of all groups of students; in particular:
 - whether lessons consistently enable students from all ability groups (especially lower-ability boys and middle-ability students) to make good progress in their learning
- the work done to strengthen the quality of leadership across the school.

Information about the school

The Blue School is a large school serving the city of Wells and its surrounding villages. Most students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is below that seen nationally. The school is a specialist college for science (incorporating mathematics) and a training school.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The Blue School has a number of areas of excellence.

- The school is a very pleasant and harmonious place to be: students behave very well and feel very safe and secure.
- The school supports its students extremely well, particularly when they face acute challenges.
- Students make a very impressive contribution to the school and local community, and there are many opportunities for them to develop leadership skills. The school has rightly received national recognition for its work in this area.
- The school's sixth form is highly effective and students leave with excellent examination results.
- The school works closely and very effectively with parents and a wide range of external partners.

Students' achievement in the main school has dipped in the last two years. Leaders recognised this and undertook a range of effective actions, including making a number of changes to the curriculum and providing more targeted support for underachieving students. As a result, achievement is now rising again. The biggest barrier to greater progress at Key Stages 3 and 4 is variability in the quality of teaching. Although good overall (and sometimes outstanding), quite a lot is only satisfactory. In particular, many teachers do not make full and effective use of assessment techniques and strategies in their teaching.

A number of things underpin the school's good capacity to sustain and continue its development.

- The headteacher and other leaders are ambitious for the school and provide good leadership and clear direction.
- Much good work has been done to strengthen the contribution that middle leaders make.
- Morale is good and staff form a cohesive and positive team.
- Leaders have a good general understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Nevertheless, their understanding of the quality of teaching is not as accurate and this limits their ability to even out the inconsistencies in teaching.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enable a greater proportion of students to make outstanding progress at Key Stages 3 and 4 by improving the consistency of teaching. In particular, ensure that all teachers:
 - make full use of information about students’ targets and current achievement when they plan lessons
 - check students’ learning during the lesson and use this information to modify activities as the lesson proceeds
 - make effective use of questioning to check and extend students’ knowledge and understanding
 - give high quality feedback to students, enabling them to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- Sharpen the way in which leaders across the school monitor classroom practice and work to improve the quality of teaching.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

- Attainment is above average and students make good progress. Students make outstanding progress in the sixth form.
- GCSE examination results dipped in 2009 and these students made satisfactory rather than good progress as they moved through the school. There is clear evidence to show that students currently in school are on track to achieve more.
- Patterns of achievement across the different groups that make up the school population have been rather variable in recent years. In particular, higher-ability students have made greater progress than middle- and lower-ability students. There is, however, good evidence to show that this gap is closing. Lower-ability boys in particular did not achieve well at GCSE in 2009, but are now achieving more. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to other students.
- Achievement in the specialist subject of mathematics is excellent. Achievement in the specialist subject of science is not as good, although students currently in Year 11 are on track to achieve much more than Year 11 students achieved last year.
- Students have very positive attitudes to school and learning. Their basic learning skills, such as oracy and the ability to work collaboratively, are good, but opportunities for students to develop these skills further are limited in less-effective lessons.
- Attendance has improved significantly in recent years and is now above average.
- Students’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has many significant strengths, but students’ understanding of cultural diversity is generally rather limited.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The school offers an excellent range of care, guidance and support for students. Those facing particularly acute challenges are extremely well supported in the school's student support centre. Effective management of attendance has led to significant improvements in recent years.

The curriculum is developing well and now meets students' needs more closely. These curriculum changes are already leading to improvements in students' achievement. The school has plans to develop the curriculum further in the next few years; these plans are sensible and carefully considered. The school provides a wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities.

Teaching has many strengths, not least teachers' strong subject knowledge and excellent relationships with students; a number of teachers are outstanding practitioners. The quality of feedback to students is excellent in some subject areas. However, where teaching is less effective:

- teachers make insufficient use of information about students' targets and achievement to inform their lesson planning
- teachers' questioning is not good enough to test students' learning or challenge them fully
- teachers miss opportunities to check students' learning during the lesson

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

- teachers spend a lot of time speaking to the whole class, limiting opportunities for students to work independently or with each other
- feedback does not leave students with a clear understanding of how to improve.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

How well do leaders across the school drive improvement?

- The headteacher and other leaders are providing strong and clear leadership for the school. Staff feel valued and proud to work at the school. Governors provide effective support and challenge.
- Good systems are in place to track students' achievement, although leaders do not yet make full use of these data when they evaluate the school's work.
- The monitoring of teaching is largely carried out within departments. While these arrangements have much to commend them, too little is done to assure the accuracy and consistency of judgements about quality across the school and some are too generous.

How good are other aspects of leadership and management?

- The school's partnership work is extensive and excellent. It includes many links with local schools and highly effective work with other agencies to support students with additional needs.
- The way in which the school safeguards its students is robust and rigorous. Leaders take their responsibilities in this area very seriously.
- Leaders have good regard to the need to promote equality. Patterns of achievement across different groups of students have been variable, but are now more consistent.
- A wide range of very useful provision is in place to promote community cohesion, although work to audit need and evaluate the impact of the provision is less well developed. Opportunities for students to develop their understanding of life in Britain as an ethnically diverse country are rather limited.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

This is a highly effective sixth form.

- Students leave with excellent outcomes. Examination results are consistently high and students make outstanding progress from their starting points at the end of Year 11.
- The quality of sixth form provision is excellent. Students praise the quality of teaching in the sixth form and the extensive support that they receive.
- The sixth form is extremely well led. Expectations of students are high and there is a relentless drive (through monitoring and tracking of students’ achievement) for improvement.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of responses to the inspection questionnaire were very positive. Very few parents or carers raised concerns or worries and many made very positive comments about the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Blue School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 346 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,432 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	131	38	188	54	19	5	5	1
The school keeps my child safe	132	38	203	59	8	2	1	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	124	36	202	58	17	5	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	124	36	193	56	23	7	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	110	32	211	61	8	2	1	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	71	21	206	60	49	14	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	89	26	215	62	31	9	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	102	29	203	59	12	3	3	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	103	30	208	60	25	7	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	108	31	196	57	25	7	9	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	83	24	197	57	32	9	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	148	43	178	51	10	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	158	46	170	49	14	4	2	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



28 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Blue School, Wells, BA5 2NR

Thank you for your help and for taking the time to talk to us during the recent inspection. I am writing to you to tell you about our main findings. We judged the school to be good overall. These are the school's particular strengths:

- an excellent sixth form
- lots of superb opportunities for you to contribute to the school and local community
- your exemplary behaviour in lessons and around school
- the high quality care, guidance and support
- the school's partnership work.

Students' achievement has dipped in recent years, but is now rising again. This has been helped by some changes to the curriculum and better support for students when they fall behind. However, while a lot of teaching is good or outstanding, quite a lot is only satisfactory; you do not make as much progress in these lessons. In particular, teachers do not always:

- use what they know about how well you are doing when they plan their lessons
- check how much you are learning during the lesson
- give you enough feedback about how to improve.

Leaders are very ambitious for the school. We have asked them to focus in particular on ironing out the inconsistencies in teaching so that all of your lessons are good.

Best wishes from the inspection team.

Chris Russell
Her Majesty's Inspector

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