

School inspection report

16 to 18 April 2024

The Blue Coat School

Somerset Road

Edgbaston

Birmingham

West Midlands

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The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders use their detailed knowledge of the school to maintain a warm, open, caring and tolerant environment. Governors visit the school frequently and provide appropriate support and oversight in pursuit of these goals.
2. Leaders appoint well-qualified staff who work effectively to meet the emotional, intellectual and physical needs of the pupils. Leaders implement policies to ensure pupils benefit from a broad and balanced education and are treated fairly. However, they should clarify their policies relating to complaints about disciplinary matters.
3. Effective, well-planned teaching using different resources skilfully ensures that pupils of all ages and abilities make good progress. Teachers collaborate successfully to support pupils experiencing difficulties and provide appropriate challenges for pupils with higher prior attainment. The wide-ranging extra-curricular and sports programmes enable pupils to extend their skills, including leadership and teamwork, and discover new interests and talents.
4. Leaders promote pupils' emotional wellbeing successfully. In their forms and houses and during break times, pupils have many opportunities for formal and informal discussion with adults who respond supportively. Leaders take appropriate account of pupils' views in shaping school policy, thereby helping to develop pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence.
5. Effective personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education encourages mutual respect and celebration of individual differences. Leaders promote a culture which values diversity and enables pupils to develop an understanding of democracy. Rewards and sanctions are administered fairly, resulting in constructive behaviour throughout the school. All aspects of health and safety are managed carefully so that pupils feel safe and secure in school.
6. Pupils prepare to play a part in wider British society by taking on leadership roles and learning about democracy and financial matters. Their involvement in charity fundraising enables them to develop a sense of responsibility. There are, however, fewer opportunities for them to contribute positively to the local community.
7. Appropriate arrangements are made to safeguard and promote pupils' wellbeing. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are suitably trained and work closely with the relevant external agencies. All staff receive the required training and know how to respond to concerns about pupils' safety and wellbeing. The suitability of staff and governors is properly checked during the recruitment process.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- clarify the school's policies with regard to complaints about behaviour management and exclusions
- strengthen the opportunities for pupils to contribute positively to the local community.

Material change request

8. Inspectors considered the school's request for a change to the details of its registration to include an increase in capacity from 664 to 720.
9. Leaders have planned and prepared effectively for the proposed material change. Planned building work takes into account the need for additional facilities, including classrooms, toilets, increased dining capacity and additional all-weather sports and play areas. Leaders have suitable plans to ensure that sufficient staff will be available to continue to supervise pupils effectively once the proposed material change takes place. The safeguarding team have sufficient capacity to cater for the proposed maximum number of pupils.
10. It is recommended that the requested material change be approved.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Leaders know the pupils well and possess the understanding required to manage the school successfully. They utilise detailed information about the academic and personal development of the pupils to support their education and pastoral care. Leaders identify school strengths and areas for development through effective self-evaluation.
12. Leaders are suitably qualified, experienced and diligent in implementing policies which contribute to positive outcomes for pupils. They ensure the curriculum meets the needs of pupils and aligns with the school's aims. They oversee effective systems of communication between different leadership and staff groups so that pupils receive appropriate support and individual needs are met.
13. Leaders provide parents with regular reports containing detailed feedback about pupils' progress and setting out their next steps in learning. Leaders ensure that all required information about the school and its policies is provided and made available to parents.
14. Governors visit the school frequently to meet with pupils and staff, join lessons, review pupils' work and observe how policies are put into practice. Governors scrutinise the effectiveness of leaders' management of the school through the safeguarding, health and safety and estates sub-committees. As a result, they know the school well and provide appropriate oversight.
15. Leaders benefit from professional training in risk management. As a result, their oversight ensures that risk assessments for the site, educational visits and pupils' mental health and wellbeing, are suitable. These identify and mitigate risks, such as potential physical hazards in indoor and outdoor areas, and also potential welfare-related risks, such as the need to ensure that individual pupils' dietary requirements are met. Daily checks of the premises help ensure that they are well maintained and secure.
16. Pupils are encouraged to challenge ideas and participate in debate. Leaders have created a stimulating, engaging environment which supports independence and self-motivation, in line with the school's aims.
17. Leaders provide teachers with clear guidance regarding consistent behaviour management. As a result, pupils feel that they are treated fairly. Discrimination is not tolerated, and leaders ensure appropriate adjustments are made so that the school meets the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and fulfils its responsibilities under equality legislation.
18. Well-trained early years staff continually review the curriculum to ensure that children learn and thrive. Leaders provide extensive opportunities for children to enjoy appropriate physical activity to foster their growth and development. Staff make effective use of the early years indoor and outdoor learning environment to support children's development.
19. Leaders work effectively with external agencies. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities liaise with safeguarding partners when appropriate. The leader of provision for pupils who have SEND works closely with a range of external specialists. Leaders liaise with the local authority, as appropriate, and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results are reported to the local authority as required.

20. Complaints are logged and, in most cases, leaders take action to ensure issues are addressed appropriately in accordance with the school's procedures. However, the wording of the behaviour management and exclusions policies is unclear, which has led to confusion and not all complaints being managed appropriately.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

21. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

22. The curriculum enables pupils to develop their knowledge and skills in a suitable range of subjects. Well-planned schemes of work for all subjects set out clearly the topics to be covered each term in order to ensure that pupils learn and make good progress. Teaching takes appropriate account of pupils' ages and abilities, and thorough assessment procedures enable effective monitoring of their achievements and progress.
23. Staff demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of their subjects. Well-planned, effective teaching takes account of the pupils' prior learning and uses the time available efficiently. Teachers enable pupils' good progress by means of different strategies, as appropriate, such as use of mobile technology, thoughtful deployment of teaching assistants, and asking pupils to explain their thinking. Teachers provide appropriate support, when needed, and more challenging activities for pupils ready to move on to the next stage in their learning. Pupils show high levels of motivation and interest in their work. They discuss concepts carefully and give opposing points of view using mature, relevant vocabulary.
24. Leaders implement a well-designed curriculum in the early years, so that children make good progress in all areas of learning. Staff provide a variety of activities to stimulate children's interests and offer appropriate challenge, such as in numeracy games which enable them to practise using different numbers to make ten, with some pupils challenged to think how to make twenty.
25. The curriculum progressively builds pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and science. Pupils enjoy creative writing and take pride in their comprehension work. They calculate the value of coins and notes, multiply decimals and find the area and perimeter of circles. Pupils show a clear understanding of scientific concepts, speaking confidently, for example, about Charles Darwin and evolution. Humanities topics engage the pupils' interests. For example, in history, pupils engage enthusiastically in role play to explore Henry VIII's role in England's break with the Roman Catholic Church.
26. Specialist tuition and staff expertise in sports and the performing and creative arts support pupils to extend their skills further. For example, they develop their vocal abilities in school choirs and enjoy much success playing musical instruments. Pupils' development of skills in areas that interest them is enhanced by their involvement in the extra-curricular activity programme which offers a diverse range of options.
27. Leaders implement a rigorous programme of lesson observations, regular checks of pupils' work and staff appraisals to monitor teaching and ensure high standards. Leaders in early years ensure children are well taught through termly meetings to review and plan the curriculum and half-termly discussions between leaders and staff in the early years.
28. Thorough, robust tracking and monitoring supports pupils' academic progress. The school's bespoke approach to assessment and feedback helps pupils develop awareness of the strengths of their work and how it could develop further. Feedback also features useful vocabulary that helps enable pupils to reflect on, discuss and share thoughts about their learning. This contributes to the good progress that all groups of pupils make. Leaders support families effectively during transition to other schools at the end of Year 6. Year 6 pupils typically achieve much success in securing places and winning scholarships at academically selective senior schools.

29. Leaders' analysis of assessment data enables the early identification of the needs of pupils who have SEND and the provision of specific action plans to support their education. Specialist teachers provide individual targeted support and strategies for teachers and teaching assistants to employ in lessons. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress.
30. Teachers successfully use a variety of effective strategies to support pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL). Individual lessons, small group work and specific additional support in class bring positive outcomes. Pupils who have EAL make good progress and frequently demonstrate rapid development in language skills.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

- 31. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

32. Leaders and staff create a learning environment which promotes positive behaviour by pupils. Pupils learn the value of mutual trust and respect, care, tolerance and kindness through chapel services, assemblies, discussions during form periods and in pastoral groups. Leaders provide weekly pastoral periods when pupils can relax and speak to adults, confident they will respond supportively. As a result, relationships between pupils and staff are positive, contributing to pupils' self-esteem and understanding of their own individual strengths and areas for development.
33. Staff at all levels know the pupils well and senior leaders are closely involved with behaviour management. Rewards and sanctions are administered fairly and there are effective procedures in place to manage any instances of racist, sexist or discriminatory behaviour. As a result, pupils understand and adhere to the school's behavioural expectations and demonstrate positive attitudes to school life. In the few cases when pupils behave inappropriately, leaders identify the reasons for this, and work closely with parents to secure improvement.
34. The relationships and sex education (RSE) programme is effective. Parents are consulted and sent written information about the topics taught. Suitable staff training, presentations from appropriately qualified external speakers and a well-structured, carefully monitored curriculum ensures that pupils receive effective teaching. The scheme of work covers friendship, familial and other relationships, dealing with conflicts and the development of communication skills.
35. Early years leaders enable children to develop and exercise independence in choosing which activity to attempt. Children happily ask for support when required and talk confidently with adults, explaining what they are doing and have learnt. Their physical development is nurtured through appropriate use of play, both indoors and outdoors, to develop their fine and gross motor skills. Appropriate staff training in first aid and food hygiene and suitable numbers of staff to provide effective supervision ensure a secure environment for early years children. Staff develop positive relationships with children who are well supported to manage their emotions and self-regulate their behaviour.
36. Leaders provide a varied range of physical activities to help pupils stay healthy. Effective coaching by appropriately qualified staff enables pupils to acquire skills in a range of different sports. Pupils develop self-esteem and an understanding of the importance of teamwork through opportunities to represent the school in competitive fixtures against other schools. Pupils learn about the importance of a healthy lifestyle in PSHE lessons and benefit from the balanced diet provided in the dining hall and during after-school care. PSHE lessons also educate pupils about themes such as how to support one's own emotional wellbeing when feeling under stress or pressure.
37. Leaders ensure effective development of the pupils' emotional and mental wellbeing. Staff share information appropriately during formal weekly staff meetings so that pupils' needs can be addressed promptly and effectively. Pupils complete regular surveys which enable staff to identify issues and support pupils effectively to overcome emotional challenges and difficulties.
38. Leaders' thorough approach to health and safety ensures that the premises and accommodation are suitably maintained. They take appropriate precautions to reduce the risk from fire, including through termly fire evacuation drills that take place termly. Staff are appropriately trained and

external professionals complete the required health and safety checks. The health and safety committee ensures effective oversight of these procedures. Admissions and attendance registers are suitably maintained, and absenteeism is followed up with parents. The school informs the local authority appropriately when pupils join or leave the school.

39. There is appropriate medical accommodation and first aid is administered in a timely and suitable manner. Staff are suitably trained in first aid, and there is always at least one paediatric first aider available to meet the needs of children in the early years. Appropriate records are kept of any administration of medication or first aid.

40. Careful and systematic deployment of staff ensures that the supervision of pupils is effective.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

41. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

42. The curriculum and programme of activities enable pupils to develop an understanding and appreciation of British values and traditions, such as democracy and individual liberty. Pupils learn about British society and current world affairs through assemblies, PSHE lessons on themes such as the importance of rules and laws in society and educational visits. As a result, they acquire knowledge and understanding to help them participate constructively in British society.
43. In line with the school's aims, leaders encourage pupils to respect others. Pupils discuss themes such as equality, gender, race and disability during pastoral periods and in PSHE lessons. As a result, they develop a sense of right and wrong and learn to celebrate people's uniqueness and identity.
44. Leaders encourage respectful debate and discussion, covering topics such as race and disability in PSHE lessons, whilst ensuring that balanced views are presented when political matters are discussed. The debating club and participation in external debating competitions help enable pupils to develop the skills of fair and respectful dialogue and demonstrating respect for people with different viewpoints to their own.
45. Pupils learn about democracy and the challenges of leadership. Pupils focus, for example, on human rights issues and the role of key individuals in history through study of the slave trade, the industrial revolution in Britain and the lives of William Wilberforce and George Cadbury. Elections to the separate pre-prep and prep department school councils and eco-committees support pupils' developing understanding of democratic values.
46. Age-appropriate activities develop pupils' knowledge of finance and careers. For example, children in the early years role-play selling seeds in the farm shop and older pupils learn about the independent use of money. Visiting speakers from key services, such as the fire and police, speak to the early years and pre-prep pupils so that they develop their understanding of the function of these services. In PSHE, older pupils consider different types of work and the qualifications and skills required for these. These experiences help prepare pupils for life in British society.
47. The PSHE and religious education programmes, chapel services and assemblies foster pupils' understanding of different cultures and beliefs and develop their respect towards those around them. For example, writing to French pen pals, discussion of global issues and study of the roles played by Black people in history enable pupils to appreciate the lives of diverse people. Pupils' understanding of religious beliefs, including Hinduism, Islam and Judaism, as well as Christianity, is developed through religious education lessons and visits to local places of worship.
48. Pupils contribute positively to the school community in many different roles, for example, as members of the pupil leadership team, school councillors, representatives on the eco-committee and chapel monitors. School and house charitable activity enables pupils to raise funds in support of local and national causes. Pupils support a range of charities, including national children's charities and a local charity helping families cope with bereavement. However, while pupils engage in litter-picking and visiting a local hospital, they have limited opportunities overall to contribute actively outside school to the local community.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

49. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

50. Leaders implement an appropriate safeguarding policy, which takes account of current statutory guidance, effectively. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are suitably trained and knowledgeable. They provide staff with appropriate induction training and regular updates so that staff understand how to respond should any safeguarding concern arise. As a result, staff are alert to potential safeguarding issues at the school and act effectively if any arise.
51. Leaders liaise closely with external agencies, and referrals to the local authorities, to children's services or the police are made promptly when required. The school has appropriate procedures to manage any low-level concerns and allegations against adults working in the school. Leaders monitor any instances of child-on-child abuse and take prompt and suitable action in response should these occur.
52. Leaders ensure that all required pre-employment checks are completed for all staff, volunteers and governors and an appropriate single central record of appointments is maintained.
53. Governors receive regular, appropriate safeguarding training. They maintain effective oversight of the school's safeguarding policy and procedures. Safeguarding is an agenda item for termly meetings of the governing body and the safeguarding governor checks the central record of appointments each term.
54. Effective filtering and monitoring of school internet usage is in place. Pupils receive effective guidance about how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Pupils are aware that they can raise any concerns anonymously or with trusted adults. Leaders and staff respond appropriately whenever pupils do raise any concerns.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 55. All the relevant Standards are met.**

School details

School	The Blue Coat School
Department for Education number	330/6070
Registered charity number	1152244
Address	The Blue Coat School Somerset Road Edgbaston Birmingham West Midlands B17 0HR
Phone number	0121 410 6800
Email address	hmpa@thebluecoatschool.com
Website	www.thebluecoatschool.com
Proprietor	The Blue Coat School Birmingham Limited
Chair	Mrs Karan Gilmore
Headteacher	Mr Noel Neeson
Age range	3 to 11
Number of pupils	638
Date of previous inspection	12 to 14 May 2021

Information about the school

56. The Blue Coat School is a co-educational day school. It is located in Edgbaston, Birmingham.
57. There are 141 pupils in the early years comprising three Nursery classes and four Reception classes.
58. The school has identified 39 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
59. English is an additional language for 144 pupils.
60. The school states its aims are to nurture a spirit of fun, adventure and curiosity in a supportive and caring Christian community. It intends to provide exceptional learning opportunities for every child through innovative, dynamic teaching while championing versatile, creative risk takers prepared for a changing world.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

16 to 18 April 2024

61. A team of six inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

62. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- a discussion with the chair of the governing body and the safeguarding governor
- discussions with the headmaster, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

63. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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