



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

**Regulatory Compliance Inspection Report
For Schools with Residential Provision**

Blundell's School

September 2022

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School's Details

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| School | Blundell's School | | | |
| DfE number | 878/6011 | | | |
| Registered charity number | 1081249 | | | |
| Address | Blundell's School Blundell's Road Tiverton Devon EX16 4DN | | | |
| Telephone number | 01884 232543 | | | |
| Email address | info@blundells.org | | | |
| Head | Mr Bart Wielenga | | | |
| Chair of governors | Mr Nigel Hall | | | |
| Age range | 11 to 18 | | | |
| Number of pupils on roll | 622 | | | |
| | Day pupils | 243 | Boarders | 379 |
| | Seniors | 428 | Sixth Form | 194 |
| Inspection dates | 22 to 23 September 2022 | | | |

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Blundell's School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school. The school is a charitable trust, whose governors are also its trustees.
- 1.2 Blundell's was founded as the result of a bequest in the will of Peter Blundell and opened as a school in 1604. It relocated to its present 100-acre site in 1882. The first girl joined the sixth form in 1975 and full co-education began in 1996. In 2001, Blundell's Prep School opened. It is located on the same campus but is inspected separately.
- 1.3 All pupils are assigned to a house comprising boarding (full, weekly and flexi) and day pupils. All members of Years 7 and 8 are in School House which is co-educational. They progress to membership of one of five senior single-sex houses. All pupils in Year 13 are members of Westlake House which aims to be 'a bespoke pre-university setting'.
- 1.4 A new chair of governors was appointed in 2020. Five of the seven houses have seen a change of houseparents since the previous inspection.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.5 The school centres its approach to education around the concepts of 'roots' and 'wings' to give pupils a grounding in values upon which to build their lives ('roots') whilst encouraging ambition and courage in the future ('wings'). Blundell's aims for its pupils to become dynamic learners whose love of learning will see them thrive.

About the pupils

- 1.6 Pupils come from a broad range of backgrounds. Approximately 40 per cent are day pupils. Equal proportions of the remainder are either flexi, weekly or full boarders. Pupils whose home is abroad make up around 17 per cent of the school community. The school does not select by ability on entry. National standardised test data indicate that the ability of pupils is average in comparison with those taking similar tests nationally. The school has 117 pupils on its learning support register with needs including dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), of whom 78 receive additional support from specialist teachers. English is an additional language (EAL) for 91 pupils of whom 41 receive additional specialist support either individually or in group sessions. The school does not identify its most able as a cohort but runs an academic enrichment programme which is open to all.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, including the National Minimum Standards for Boarding ('boarding NMS'), where applicable. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a COMPLIANCE ONLY inspection and as such reports only on the school's compliance with the standards, including the boarding NMS. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated and the school is required to take the actions specified.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school does not meet all of the required standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2022 and associated requirements, and should take immediate action to remedy deficiencies as detailed below.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school's GCSE and A-level results in the years 2020 to 2022 confirm that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place. Boarders have access to a suitable programme of activities.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships and sex education, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens. Boarders' views are actively encouraged, and their opinions and concerns are appropriately considered by staff. Boarders are supported to develop good relationships with fellow pupils and staff which are based on mutual trust and respect. Any prefect system operating in the school is suitably managed.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] and NMS 13, 17 and 21 are met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 In most respects, arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 An appropriate induction process for pupils new to boarding is implemented, and suitable provision is made for boarders' medical and health care, their food and drink and for managing boarders' laundry and possessions. Boarders have suitable contact with friends and family. Boarding staff are appropriately trained and deployed.
- 2.10 The school's procedures for checking the suitability of staff and proprietors and for maintaining a single central register of appointment checks lack rigour and pose a risk to the safeguarding of pupils and boarders. Risk assessments had not always been carried out for members of staff whose criminal record checks had not arrived by the time they started work and a separate barred list check had not always been undertaken. Teaching staff and proprietors had not always been checked against the list of those prohibited from teaching or, where appropriate, from managing schools. A few staff started

working at the school before suitable references had been received. Evidence for some checks was missing from staff files.

- 2.11 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 9–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 and NMS 3, 5–9, 10–12, 15, 16 and 20 are met, but those in paragraphs 7 [safeguarding] and 8 [safeguarding of boarders] and NMS 8.1 [safeguarding] and 19 [staff recruitment in boarding schools] are not met.**

Action point 1

The school must ensure that it checks all staff, where appropriate, against the list of those prohibited from teaching and/or from managing schools before they start work at the school [paragraphs 7(a) and (b), 8(a) and (b); NMS 8.1 and 19.1].

Action point 2

Where a DBS check is not available before staff start work, the school should conduct a risk assessment and carry out a separate barred list check [paragraph 7(a) and (b), 8(a) and (b); NMS 8.1 and NMS 19.1].

Action point 3

The school must ensure that it receives at least two references for all staff before they start work at the school [paragraph 7(a) and (b), 8(a) and (b); NMS 8.1 and NMS 19.1].

Action point 4

The school must ensure that it maintains evidence of the checks undertaken in staff files [paragraph 7(a) and (b), 8(a) and (b); NMS 8.1 and NMS 19.1].

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.12 The school does not appoint supply staff. Although they had not been carried out at the start of the inspection, checks on staff, where relevant, against the list of those prohibited from teaching and on proprietors against the list of these prohibited from management had been carried out by the end of the inspection. Identity checks, medical fitness and right to work checks had been carried out for all staff, but not always before appointment. Not all staff have had their qualifications checked and recorded on the single central register, and the checks have occasionally been carried out after appointment. One member of staff has not had a criminal record check.**
- 2.13 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school in paragraphs 19 and 20 are met, but those in paragraphs 18 [suitability of staff], 21 [single central register] and NMS19 [staff recruitment in boarding schools] are not met.**

Action point 5

The school must ensure that, where relevant, qualifications for all staff, including those involved in boarding, are checked [paragraph 18(2)(c)(iv); 18(2)(f); NMS 19.1].

Action point 6

The school must ensure that an enhanced criminal record certificate is obtained for all members of staff, including those involved in boarding [paragraph 18(2)(d); 18(2)(f); NMS 19.1].

Action point 7

The school must ensure that all relevant checks are undertaken before a member of staff begins work at the school [paragraph 18(3); NMS 19.1].

Action point 8

The school must ensure that all checks are recorded accurately on the single central register of appointments [paragraph 21(3)(a)(iv and v); NMS 19.1].

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.14 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play. Boarding accommodation is adequate for the needs of all boarders, and safeguards and promotes their welfare.
- 2.15 **The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] and NMS 4, 7 and 23 are met.**

PART 6 – Provision of information

- 2.16 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website. A suitable statement of boarding principles and practice is published by the school.
- 2.17 **The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] and NMS 1 are met.**

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

- 2.18 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful, and identifying those relating to the boarding provision.
- 2.19 **The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] and NMS 14 are met.**

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 2.20 The proprietors have not ensured that those with leadership and management responsibility have the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil their responsibilities effectively and thereby promote the wellbeing of pupils. They have not exercised sufficient oversight of the way checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children.

2.21 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school in paragraph 34 and NMS 2 are not met.

Action point 9

The proprietors must ensure that school leaders have sufficient skills and knowledge to fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently and the wellbeing of pupils is promoted [paragraph 34(1)(a), (b) and (c); NMS 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.8].

3. Inspection Evidence

3.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended chapel and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

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|-------------------|---|
| Mr David Morgan | Reporting inspector |
| Mrs Susan Bonell | Compliance team inspector (Former bursar, SofH school) |
| Mr Stephen Fox | Team inspector for boarding (ISI reporting inspector) |
| Mr Andrew Selkirk | Team inspector for boarding (Former deputy head, SofH school) |