



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

BLOXHAM SCHOOL

FEBRUARY 2017



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Bloxham School			
DfE number	931/6002			
Registered charity number	1076484			
Address	Bloxham Banbury Oxfordshire OX15 4PE			
Telephone number	01295 724341			
Email address	pws@bloxhamschool.com			
Headmaster	Mr Paul Sanderson			
Chair of governors	Mr Miles Hedges			
Age range	11 to 19			
Number of pupils on roll	425			
	Boys	264	Girls	161
	Day pupils	234	Boarders	191
	Seniors	285	Sixth Form	140
Inspection dates	1 to 2 February 2017			

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards following their inspection may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

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.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

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 the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

All inspections of independent schools in England are conducted according to the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

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

Inspectors

Mrs Colette Culligan	Reporting inspector
Mr Jason Slack	Team inspector (Headmaster, HMC school)
Mr Matthew Judd	Team inspector (Second master, HMC school)
Mrs Jenny Dwyer	Team inspector (Headmistress, GSA and HMC school)
Mr Matthew Thornby	Team inspector (Housemaster, HMC school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Bloxham school is a co-educational day and boarding school located close to Banbury in Oxfordshire. Founded in 1860 by The Reverend Philip Egerton, it is part of the Woodard School group; a family of 45 schools across England and Wales. A board of local governors has responsibility for oversight of the day-to-day operations of the school and implementation of its policies. Since the previous standard inspection the school has introduced a new tracking system to provide a holistic view of pupils' progress. Learning support provision has extended to include the needs of the more able. Considerable investment has been made in careers education, and in the provision of laptops and tablets for pupils' use. The curriculum has been restructured to reflect the school's core belief in a truly all-round education, and community service opportunities are formally structured into the timetabled week. The refurbishment of a building to provide a new day house is under way.
- 1.2 The school is structured into three sections: Lower School for Years 7 and 8; Middle School for Years 9 to 11; and sixth form. It has seven boarding houses. Crake, Egerton, Seymour and Wilson houses cater for boys from Year 9 upwards. Girls of this age are accommodated in Raymond or Wilberforce houses. Park Close is located a short walk from the school and is the only house not located on the main school campus. It provides co-educational accommodation for pupils in Years 7 and 8.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school's aims and ethos are firmly rooted in the Christian traditions of the Woodard foundation. It sets out to foster creativity and a passion for learning through a curriculum that balances academic achievement with the development of wider skills. It aims to support this through pastoral care that nurtures the development of character within the framework of sound values.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come largely from professional White British families living within a 60-mile radius of the school. The 26 overseas boarders come from China, Russia, Germany and Spain. The school offers a flexible approach to boarding, based on individual needs. A total of 174 pupils board full time; the majority of day pupils take advantage of the school's flexibility and board at some point in the term.
- 1.5 Nationally standardised data provided by the school indicate that the ability of pupils in Years 7 to 11 is above average, with few having average or below average ability. The ability of pupils in the sixth form is in line with the national average. Results at GCSE have been above the national average, and A-level results have been in line with the national average. These results, scrutiny of work and standardised measures of progress made available indicate that pupils make appropriate progress in relation to pupils of similar abilities.

- 1.6 The school has identified 39 pupils as having special education needs or disabilities (SEND), mostly for dyslexia, dyscalculia or dyspraxia, and 2 pupils with statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans (EHC). All receive the required extra support within the school. English is an additional language (EAL) for 22 pupils, of whom 16 require extra teaching in English from the school. The learning support department and scholars' programmes provide extra support and extension for the 56 pupils identified as more able or gifted in specific academic subjects.
- 1.7 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
Form 1	Year 7
Form 2	Year 8
Form 3	Year 9
Form 4	Year 10
Form 5	Year 11
Lower 6	Year 12
Upper 6	Year 13

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.8 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was a standard inspection in November 2010. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Encourage greater awareness of career opportunities and work experience by developing careers education further.
 - Ensure that sixth formers have sufficient opportunities for community service in the curriculum and through extra-curricular activities.
- 1.9 The school has successfully met both the recommendations of this previous inspection. Further detail is given in the main text of the report.
- 1.10 The recommendation of the intermediate boarding inspection in February 2014 was:
- Ensure that consistent procedures are in place for boarders to sign in and out.
- 1.11 The school has successfully met the recommendation of this previous inspection.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- More able pupils make progress in line with their ability. Pupils with SEND, EHC plans or EAL make good progress due to the excellent support provided.
- Pupils overall make good academic progress, but on occasion teaching approaches that do not fully engage pupils result in more limited progress.
- Pupils reach outstanding levels of achievement in a wide range of activities beyond the classroom.

2.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- The school is extremely successful in engendering the growth of character based on sound values, due to excellent guidance from tutors.
- Pupils are supported by the clarity of the school's ethos and its wholehearted commitment to a rounded education which moves well beyond the classroom.
- Pupils develop into happy, mature, confident individuals with a highly developed sense of responsibility for self and others.
- Pupils' involvement in community service enables them to understand what it means to be a force for good, and helps significantly in forming their characters and values.

Recommendation

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement:

- Ensure that pupils' progress is consistently good across all subject areas by sharing the good practice evident in questioning and classroom management.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.2 The school is consistently successful in meeting its aim to provide a genuinely rounded education, balancing academic progress with involvement in a wide range of activities beyond the classroom. Pupils' basic skills develop well across the range of requisite areas of learning. They are articulate, reading and writing fluently and with increasingly sophisticated vocabulary. Pupils confidently apply numerical skills across the curriculum and demonstrate a good understanding of scientific concepts. Their creativity is especially well developed, evident in the exceptional quality of the art work displayed around the school, in pupils' music making and in drama productions. Very high levels of voluntary involvement in sports and the outdoor education opportunities offered by the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) and the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) support their physical development. The school's investment in provision of technology and laptops for pupils enables them to use information and communication technology confidently and at times imaginatively in their learning.
- 3.3 Pupils reach good levels in their academic work. The following analysis uses the national data for 2013 to 2015, the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are available. Results at GCSE have been better than those of pupils of similar ability in maintained schools, and those at A level in line with those of similar ability. Results at A level in 2016 displayed an improvement in the percentages of A* to A grades received in comparison to those in previous years, with girls performing better than boys. Most pupils leaving at the end of Year 13 go on to university, their subject choices ranging widely.
- 3.4 Pupils make good progress overall. Those identified with SEND or EHC plans are provided excellent help by the learning support department, enabling them to make good progress and gain examination results in line with those of their peers. Examples were observed of excellent awareness of individual needs in lessons; more able pupils enjoyed interesting extension tasks, while those struggling appreciated opportunities to revisit a topic or successfully tackled a task with the help of the extra hints on their worksheets. The pupils understand that all may benefit from help at times, and so many including the more able make use of the learning support department's guidance at some point. More able pupils benefit from the school's flexibility in allowing early entry for GCSE followed by individual tuition at A level for pupils with special academic gifts. Responses both from parents and pupils to the pre-inspection questionnaire displayed high levels of satisfaction with the progress that pupils make and their academic achievements.
- 3.5 Some pupils receive academic recognition in national challenges such as in biology and mathematics. Pupils have won national scholarships in design technology (DT) in three of the last four years. A comprehensive tracking system is well utilized by teachers and tutors to provide a clear picture of pupils' progress across all areas of the curriculum. A small number of pupils indicated in their questionnaire responses that they do not find the marking of their work helpful. Inspection evidence gained from interviews with pupils and comments in their self-reviews demonstrated that they understand the advice provided and know what to do to make improvements. Evening prep sessions in houses are well-organised and supervised, creating a purposeful atmosphere in which pupils can consolidate their understanding. The school has responded fully to the recommendation made in the previous standard inspection report to improve careers guidance, which is now of high-quality and extensive. Pupils in interview expressed that the thorough and objective information on career opportunities and work experience is helpful as they reflect on their choices for the future.

- 3.6 Across the curriculum generally, pupils' interest is sustained and their progress supported well by teaching which maintains a swift pace, uses open and probing questioning, and draws on an imaginative range of techniques. This was observed in many subjects, for example in the use of lively quizzes and in strategies recognising different learning styles when reading Shakespearean texts or to strengthen pupils' knowledge of verb endings in languages. On occasion the progress of pupils below the sixth form is slowed by limited and closed questioning, and excessive teacher exposition. In such instances the pace of learning is hampered as pupils lose focus and become distracted. Pupils persevere when facing challenges. This was observed on a number of occasions, such as pupils rectifying stitching errors in textiles and others formulating the area of a circle from first principles. They find conquering such challenges very satisfying.
- 3.7 Overall, pupils are keen to learn, as is evident in the voluntary involvement in lectures and activities initially set up to extend the more able pupils. A minority of pupils indicated in their questionnaire responses that they feel they are not provided an objective political view in class discussions. No evidence was found to support this; clear examples were observed of staff putting forward both sides of a political argument with explicit statements that pupils must form their own opinions. Pupils are articulate and confident in discussion, their speaking skills honed from the start by encouragement to take part in presentations and performances. They can debate complex and abstract ideas thoughtfully, such as the intrinsic value of the arts and the challenges posed by the development of robotics. Pupils listen respectfully to others' opinions and counter them with logical and well-expressed arguments. As they mature, pupils' study skills develop well, and they develop high-order skills in framing hypotheses and synthesizing information. Analytical skills develop well; in a lesson discussing poetry, pupils explored and explained the impact of rhyming pattern and choice of tense on the meaning of text. They enjoy working together on projects, whether creating group mind-maps on motivational theory or making models of a Roman villa. Pupils think independently and use their initiative in deciding how to respond to a task, as seen in DT, biology and physics.
- 3.8 Pupils' ability to work together well is evident in their boarding lives as well as in their academic work. This skill is both the result of and a contributory factor to their outstanding level of success in activities outside the classroom. Team and individual sporting achievements proliferate. If necessary, the school adapts the timetables of individuals with particular talents to allow them to train or participate in clubs and sports academies outside school. Annually, large numbers of pupils play various sports including hockey and rugby at regional level. Individuals compete at national level, some becoming national champions. Involvement in the DofE is popular; most Year 9 pupils complete bronze level and 80 pupils are currently working towards their gold award. Many pupils choose to join the CCF and to continue with this throughout their time in the school. Almost half of the pupils take music lessons and are successful at high levels in examinations as well as in local festivals. The chapel choir has sung evensong at St Paul's Cathedral and at the daily remembrance service at the Menin Gate Memorial in Ypres. Involvement in public speaking and drama is also very popular, with many pupils from Year 7 onwards seeing success in speech and drama examinations. An auditioned group took a devised play to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2016. Particularly talented individuals have appeared in professional productions in London and Stratford.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils' excellent personal development is apparent in their friendly, supportive dealings with each other in the boarding houses and in school life as a whole. Pupils are happy and describe their experience of school life as great fun; they are proud of their school and of their houses. The school is highly successful in meeting its aim to nurture the development of character within the framework of sound values. Its ethos and firm commitment to an education which moves well beyond the classroom provides pupils with formative experiences that shape their understanding of their moral and personal responsibilities. Pupils benefit considerably from the community service programme which is now fully integrated into the curriculum for all, including the sixth form.
- 4.3 The pupils are self-confident without any hint of arrogance. Their strong self-esteem and understanding of their own worth as unique individuals is supported by the constant encouragement that they receive to participate in activities, regardless of skill levels. Pupils develop confidence in facing challenge and resilience in the face of any failures. Their housemasters, housemistresses and tutors play pivotal roles in providing an excellent level of pastoral care. With the honest advice and guidance that such staff provide, pupils learn to understand that the decisions they make, academically and in their behaviour, have an impact on their future. Their behaviour is almost always very good. Should they fall below the school's expectations, the senior leadership takes firm and appropriate action. Such action is also educative, requiring the miscreants to put themselves in other people's shoes and to think about the impact of unacceptable actions on others.
- 4.4 From their very first days in the school, pupils are provided opportunities to take responsibility and leadership in house activities involving boarders and day pupils alike. As a result, a belief is absorbed that becoming involved and providing time to support others is the norm; pupils take it for granted as 'just what Bloxham pupils do'. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 take full charge in organising their house music competitions, from producing the programmes to performing on the night. Older pupils take responsibility for planning activities aimed at raising money for charities, from cake sales to triathlons. In such ventures they support each other and work collaboratively to find ways around issues so that all can become involved, regardless of abilities. The vertically organised tutor groups are helpful in providing routine opportunities for older pupils to help support and advise their juniors. Sixth form prefects and peer supporters provide an extra layer of guidance and sympathetic listening ears for any pupils experiencing difficulties. They understand their responsibilities as role models for the younger pupils and live up to these expectations.

- 4.5 A strong sense of community and of communal responsibility permeates relationships throughout and directly contributes to the pupils' well-being. Pupils have very well-developed moral compasses; knowing what is the right thing to do becomes instinctive as they move up through the school. In their questionnaire responses, parents and pupils were almost unanimous in their statement that the school has high behavioural expectations of pupils and that bullying is rare. Discussions with pupils confirmed this; pupils said that it is dealt with swiftly by the school should it happen, and in a manner that also helps the perpetrator learn from mistakes. Pupils have a well-developed sense of natural justice which is apparent in discussion in personal, social, health and citizenship (PSHC) lessons and furthered by their involvement in community service. Pupils are eloquent when talking about this. In interview they expressed how they enjoy activities such as visiting dementia sufferers, helping to coach sports with junior-aged children and working in a local food bank. Pupils also reflect soberly on the impact of these experiences on themselves. They said that these experiences have not only been immensely rewarding but also opened their eyes to the needs of others and the importance of charitable work. As well as group-organized ventures, individuals have taken the initiative in independent fundraising activities, raising considerable amounts of money for their own choice of charities. Such actions demonstrate the school's success in achieving its aim that its pupils should understand their responsibilities and become a force for good in the world. A tangible conviction is evident in pupils' everyday dealings with each other and engendered by the community service programme, that giving time and effort to help others is its own reward and quite simply the right thing to do.
- 4.6 In their questionnaire responses, a minority of boarders said that they do not feel that an appropriate balance between free time and activities is provided. The inspection agrees that their school lives are very busy but also judges that they derive considerable benefit from the compulsory involvement in activities, key to the school's philosophy, and that boarders have sufficient unstructured time in which to relax. In conversation, pupils said that their free time is limited but that this is a result of them wanting to take advantage of all the opportunities available to them. The school has ensured that support mechanisms are in place in addition to tutors and peer supporters to help pupils should they feel under pressure. House matrons provide what was described as a 'soft place to land' when life feels difficult. A guidance counsellor is available to all, and pupils speak appreciatively of the mindfulness activity which helps them find techniques to engender a sense of calm and balance. The extensive sports programme helps ensure that pupils get plenty of exercise. A small minority of boarders' questionnaire responses expressed discontent with the food, but this was not supported by their comments in discussions. All pupils are provided with plentiful amounts of healthy, appetising food and appropriate snacks outside meal times. Parents and pupils were in virtually unanimous agreement that the school provides a safe and secure environment for pupils. Pupils are well supervised; signing in and out procedures are now consistent across the houses.

- 4.7 Pupils have a deep understanding of the significance of a non-material dimension of life and of respecting all equally, regardless of cultural background, religious belief or abilities. Assemblies are used to underline such attitudes, supporting the overt teaching provided in personal, social and health education lessons. Overseas boarders are swiftly made to feel part of the school community, and pupils take the initiative in making sure that significant festivals that would be marked in their home countries are recognised in the house. An awareness of spirituality and aesthetic beauty permeates the school, evident in the pupils' appreciation of art, music and their environment. Pupils value the calm and numinous atmosphere of the chapel, describing it as a quiet place where they can sit and think about life. Opportunities to reflect on ethical and philosophical matters that arise naturally in lessons stimulate thought in pupils, who were heard asking questions such as 'Is a person's inner voice the same thing as conscience?' and 'Can a miracle ever be a bad thing?'. The clarity of the values-driven approach of governance and senior leadership underpins all that the school does. This is a significant reason why the school has excellent levels of success in encouraging pupils to develop as individuals whose characters are firmly grounded in good principles.