



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

Reading Blue Coat School

November 2019



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School's Details

School	Reading Blue Coat School			
DfE number	872/6006			
Registered charity number	1087839			
Address	Reading Blue Coat School Sonning Lane Sonning on Thames Reading Berkshire RG4 6SU			
Telephone number	0118 9441005			
Email address	reception@rbcs.org.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Jesse Elzinga			
Chair of governors	Mr Peter Bertram			
Age range	11 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	760			
	Lower School	196	Middle School	313
	Sixth Form	251		
Inspection dates	12 to 14 November 2019			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Reading Blue Coat School was founded in 1646 and moved to a site by the Thames in the village of Sonning in Berkshire in 1947. It is an independent day school for male pupils aged between 11 and 18, and for female pupils, who are admitted only to the Sixth Form. It is owned by the Reading Blue Coat School Charitable Trust, and the school is run by a separate board of governors. Since the previous inspection, the school has extended its arrangements for pastoral care and academic oversight, has further developed the use of digital technology and revised the sixth form curriculum. The development of the school site has continued, including games facilities and a new innovation centre for teaching and learning centre, and a new grounds, maintenance and activities centre.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school's aim is to create a nurturing environment which promotes self-discipline, responsibility, spiritual awareness and a moral code. The objective is that pupils will be equipped with the qualities which will mark them out after they leave school: curiosity, creativity, consideration for others, good habits and a sense of service.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come from a range of professional and business backgrounds, mostly from white British families living within 20 miles of the school. Data provided by the school indicates that the ability of the pupils in the Lower and Middle Schools (Years 7-11) is well above average, and in the Sixth Form above average, compared to those taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 21 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, all of whom receive additional specialist help. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan, or English as an additional language (EAL). Data used by the school have identified 71 pupils as academic scholars and offers them additional programmes of study.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

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. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. Additionally, the inspection reports 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. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

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 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.

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 a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, the report of which appears later in this document. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. 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 in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key regulations and standards have been inspected in detail. These are the regulations on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety, arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information to parents; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

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 full regulations and requirements can be found here [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 At GCSE in the years 2016 to 2018, performance has been above the national average for maintained schools.
- 2.3 In the Sixth Form, A-level results in the years 2016 to 2018 have been above the national average for sixth formers in maintained schools.
- 2.4 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.
- 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.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 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 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

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

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

2.12 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.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 A range of information is variously 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.

2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 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.

2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports 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.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. 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'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- Pupils develop excellent knowledge, understanding and skills across the full range of academic subjects.
 - Pupils have outstanding skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking.
 - Pupils are highly numerate and apply their knowledge successfully to other subjects.
 - Pupils have strong study skills and use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively, but do not always effectively use written feedback they receive.
 - Pupils' achievements in activities are excellent.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils show exceptional qualities of self-confidence and self-esteem.
 - Pupils' social development and collaboration skills are excellent.
 - Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the lives of others.
 - Pupils are extremely respectful and tolerant towards those of different backgrounds and traditions.
 - Pupils show an excellent awareness of how to keep safe and healthy.

Recommendation

- 3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes the school might wish to consider how the pupils might more consistently use written feedback to help improve their work.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Pupils make good progress over time in relation to their starting points, across the full range of subjects at both GCSE and A level, which is not reflected in the data. In almost all cases, their examination results are at least in line with expectations based on nationally standardised test data, and frequently exceed them. Results overall are above the national average for maintained schools. There are no significant differences in the attainment of different groups of pupils, including those with SEND. This is sometimes a result of a modified curriculum which meets their needs more closely. Pupils' short-term progress as observed in lessons is also excellent. Almost all pupils who apply are admitted to the university of their choice, including to those with the most demanding entry requirements. Pupils have high expectations for themselves and are prepared to work hard and do their best. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, almost all pupils and parents said that they felt that teaching at the school enabled the pupils to make progress and equipped them with skills for the future.

- 3.6 Pupils develop excellent knowledge, skills and understanding in all areas of learning, linguistic, mathematical, scientific, creative and aesthetic, technological, human and social. They apply their skills effectively to other areas of learning. Pupils grow in confidence as they become more adept learners. In class they discuss and argue coherently as they test their knowledge and explore ideas. A large proportion of lessons offer excellent opportunities for debate. Pupils accurately assess their own progress within a rigorous regime of testing and examination preparation. They take advantage of opportunities to solve multi-stage problems, learning to self-correct and to evaluate their own methods. However, written work analysed suggest they do not uniformly use the written feedback given by teachers. They learn to apply their knowledge and understanding in unfamiliar contexts in geology fieldwork. In German and Spanish classes pupils show sophisticated active vocabulary and are able to adapt it appropriately to fit different contexts. Pupils are successful collectively and individually in activities, winning recognition for their academic, athletic and creative achievements. Pupils feel that the qualities that they develop in activities also help them to raise their attainment in academic work. In the questionnaire, almost all parents and pupils agreed that the range of extra-curricular activities was suitable.
- 3.7 Pupils have outstanding communication skills. They read widely, with excellent speed, accuracy and comprehension. This is often prompted by the reading challenges set in the weekly reading periods in the library in the younger years. Pupils read aloud with expression and enjoyment in class and in assembly, and grow in confidence from taking part in public speaking and recitation classes, and drama productions at all ages. They speak with assurance and maturity in lessons, and in formal and informal settings. For example, pupils explained with great clarity their understanding of wave properties in a GCSE physics class, and sixth form history pupils made excellent presentations on aspects of the Napoleonic War using appropriate software, class handouts and a fluent, scholarly commentary. Pupils practising for a public speaking competition were confident and humorous. In class pupils listen carefully and respectfully to one another and to their teachers, and so group work in lessons is effective as they exchange ideas and build on the suggestions of others. By the time they reach the Sixth Form, over half accept the challenge of the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) as part of their enrichment programme. Almost all complete the course and results are outstanding. Pupils analyse complex texts and present ideas using a rich and sophisticated vocabulary. They reach qualified judgements, linking evidence to opinion with rigour, and showing a rare taste for paradox.
- 3.8 Pupils are highly numerate and apply their knowledge successfully to a range of subjects across the curriculum. For example, they design graphs in geography to illustrate data sets, and devise equations to describe their science experiments. Similarly, pupils have excellent skills in computing and ICT. All do a core module in the pre-GCSE years to ensure they have a solid grounding, and they deploy their knowledge and skills well to research and present in a range of subjects. ICT is present in all aspects of school life: resources are available only on the intranet; the pupil learning council has produced a guide to revision applications; and touch-typing courses are available to those who would benefit from them. Pupils' study skills are strong through a structured course for the Lower School and external presentations to the Middle School. Pupils can draw together sources in classics, self-correct in mathematics, think freely and explore in religious studies (in which all pupils sit a GCSE in Year 10) and, in the sixth form, analyse and hypothesise in response to increasingly demanding material. They do not consistently take full advantage of written feedback from teachers to understand how to improve the quality and accuracy of their work.

- 3.9 Pupils have achieved a high measure of success in enrichment activities. For example, pupils recently reached the national final of the *Peter Watson Award* at a Cambridge college for scientific research in the EPQ. They have been competitive in national and international public speaking competitions and sporting contests. Participation rates are unusually high with strengthening fixture lists and plentiful opportunities for pupils to represent the school at an appropriate level. Pupils are routinely awarded music diplomas; and achieve gold in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and medals in mathematics and science Olympiads. Focus weeks and termly self-appraisal with target setting ('pupil profiles') are effective means by which pupils examine their overall contribution to school life. This enables them to reflect on ways in which they might participate more fully. Their attitude is characterised by enthusiasm and positivity. This is encouraged by teaching which is quick to praise pupils for what they have achieved and to encourage them to be more ambitious still.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.10 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.11 Pupils show exceptional qualities of self-confidence and self-esteem. They interact naturally and effectively with one another and with the adult world in formal and informal settings. They have a clear sense of what they are seeking to achieve during their time in school. They are always trying to find ways in which they can improve their work, and their contribution to the school and the wider community. They develop a sense of self-worth because they are entrusted with the running of many aspects of the life of the school. This ranges from organising and speaking in assemblies to arranging teams for house competitions, and encompasses, for example, roles as peer mentor, prefect, council member and sports captain. They become more resilient as a result of the many demanding activities they all undertake. These include the Years 7 and 8 outdoor programmes, the placements in primary schools to teach and coach, and the large-scale projects in Ghana and Nepal. They give their time and energy to others and are often transformed as a result. Pupils recognise the importance of being aware of their own mental health. In this they are supported by the stance and behaviour of the adult members of the community, who quietly but insistently remind pupils that it is acceptable not to feel all right. Pupils know that if they are not concentrating when a question is asked, it will be best to say so rather than pretend otherwise.
- 3.12 Pupils generally make shrewd and well-judged decisions about how to use their time. They understand the importance of decision-making and accept responsibility for the outcome. They are allowed to make their own decisions and to understand the consequences of their choices, for example in how they behave or how hard they work at their academic subjects. In this they are very well supported by the tutorial system. Older pupils offer advice at assemblies on, for example, mobile telephone use, and how to revise effectively for examinations. They also hold special assemblies to raise matters of social and family pressures and, in due course, choices about driving and their path beyond school, inviting younger pupils to consider their choices in the light of others' experience. Pupils feel at liberty to pursue a non-traditional degree-level apprenticeship instead of applying to a selective university if that meets their needs and suits their abilities. Pupils also recognise the value of constraints on their behaviour and the need for a system of sanctions. They rarely commit the same offence twice: they are invited formally to reflect on their behaviour when sanctioned. This also indicates a strong moral compass in accordance with the principles of the school's charitable origins, reinforced by a carefully designed strand of the personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) programme.

- 3.13 Pupils have a good spiritual understanding strengthened by the formal religious education programme and the weekly spiritual assemblies for the whole school. They have a say in the themes of assemblies, and are often addressed by a visitor, such as a genocide survivor from Rwanda, or an art therapist who works in a prison. There are opportunities for discussion in tutor time afterwards. Written work in, for example A level history and English indicates a commitment to the non-material aspects of life, and some pupils speak of the impact of being involved in music, art and drama, as well as the beauty of the school' environment. In the week of the inspection most of those present were moved by the silence of the Act of Remembrance. They said it evoked memories of the school's performance of *Private Peaceful* earlier in the year.
- 3.14 Pupils show excellent social development and collaboration skills. This is so in lessons. Numerous examples were observed of pupils offering help to others when in need. One junior Latin class devised together a rule about genders of nouns based on their collective observations. In other elements of the life of the school, leadership training in the Sixth Form, mentoring in the Middle School, and Activities Week in the Lower School all contribute at different stages to a common theme of social responsibility and collaboration to solve common problems. Carefully selected groupings for tasks when outward bound, for example, promotes pupils' capacity to accommodate differences in others that they do not know well. The work of age-related school councils and the whole-school version has been effective in addressing homework issues as well as securing charging points for devices and a water fountain. Almost all parents and pupils in the questionnaire said that the school actively promotes social skills and teamwork.
- 3.15 Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the lives of others. Their work in digital, learning and food councils, mentoring and as prefects help the school community to become a better place. Year 8 pupils help ensure a smooth transition for new Year 7 pupils, and Year 12 Lesson Helpers support learning in lessons for younger pupils. Sports leaders programmes and primary school placements ensure that pupils support the local community, and the Aldworth Partnership as an umbrella organisation for outreach enables pupils to offer practical help in Africa and Asia. Pupils also raise money for local charities concerned with, for example, mental health and homelessness.
- 3.16 Pupils are extremely respectful and tolerant towards those of different backgrounds and traditions. The school's population reflects the make-up of much of the local community on which it draws, and pupils are sufficiently well integrated that pilot schemes for cultural opportunities have been set aside. Trips and exchanges, and the planning of assemblies with visiting speakers, further promote sensitivity and appreciation of other cultures. In the pre-inspection survey, almost all parents and pupils said that the school actively promotes tolerance and respect.
- 3.17 Pupils show excellent awareness of how to keep safe and healthy. They engage positively with the Lower School programme of speakers on, for example, fire safety, health and nutrition, and mental health issues. In the Middle School the food council is actively involved in the choices of food provided. In the Sixth Form many pupils choose to download mindfulness applications. They also help to create the healthy menu in their café. Throughout the school pupils discuss the elements in the PSHEE programme which deal with safety and healthy lifestyles. They also engage fully with the extensive programme of PE and games. In the questionnaire, almost all parents and pupils said that the school encourages pupils to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

4. Inspection Evidence

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

Inspectors

Mr Bill Burn	Reporting inspector
Mr Richard Murray	Compliance team inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mr Oliver Chambers	Team inspector (Assistant head, HMC school)
Mrs Rebecca Glover	Team inspector (Principal, HMC school)
Mr Chris Townsend	Team inspector (Head, HMC school)
Mrs Louise Wilson	Team inspector (Deputy head, HMC school)