



Material Change Inspection Report

The Blue Coat School Birmingham

February 2024

School's details

School	The Blue Coat School, Birmingham			
DfE number	330/6070			
Registered charity number	1152244			
Address	The Blue Coat School Somerset Road Edgbaston Birmingham West Midlands B17 0HR			
Telephone number	01214106800			
Email address	hmpa@thebluecoatschool.com			
Headmaster	Mr Noel Neeson			
Chair of governors	Mrs Karan Gilmore			
Proprietor	The Blue Coat School Birmingham Limited			
Age range	3 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	638			
	EYFS	141	Pre-Prep	131
	Prep	366		
Date of inspection	2 February 2024			

1. Introduction

Characteristics of the school

- 1.1 The Blue Coat School is a co-educational independent day school. It was founded in 1722 as a co-educational charity school in the centre of Birmingham. In 1930, the school moved to its current fifteen-acre campus, two miles from the city centre. It is a charitable trust administered by a board of governors. The school is organised into: the pre-prep department for pupils aged three to seven, which includes the early years; and a prep department for those aged seven to eleven. The school has 39 pupils who require support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupil has an education, health and care plan. English is an additional language for 145 pupils. The school's previous inspection was a regulatory compliance inspection in May 2021.

Purpose of the inspection

- 1.2 This was an announced material change inspection at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) to assess the school's proposal to increase pupil capacity from 650 to 664. The inspection focused on the school's compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs) and the requirements of the Early Years Statutory Framework.

Regulations which were the focus of the inspection	Team judgements
Part 3, paragraphs 7 (safeguarding)	Met
Part 3, paragraph 11 (health and safety)	Met
Part 3, paragraph 12 (fire safety)	Met
Part 3, paragraph 14 (supervision of pupils)	Met
Part 3, paragraph 16 (risk assessment)	Met
Part 4, paragraphs 18 to 21 (suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors)	Met
Part 5, paragraphs 23 to 29 (premises of and accommodation at schools)	Met
Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c) (provision of information)	Met
Part 7, paragraph 33 (complaints procedure)	Met
Part 8, paragraph 34 (leadership and management)	Met

2. Inspection findings

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 7]

Safeguarding policy

- 2.1 The school meets the requirements.
- 2.2 The school has an appropriate policy for safeguarding which provides suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.

Safeguarding implementation

- 2.3 The school meets the standard.
- 2.4 Scrutiny of records, observation, and discussions with pupils and staff indicate that appropriate safeguards are implemented effectively, including in the early years. Those responsible for safeguarding hold senior positions within the school. They are suitably knowledgeable and appropriately trained, including for multi-agency working. Safeguarding, pastoral and healthcare staff, including those in the 'lighthouse' wellbeing room, share key information regularly and effectively. They take into account each individual pupil's physical and psychological needs and wishes, including those with SEND. This information is used to agree appropriate action including the drawing-up and implementation of individual support plans. There is effective liaison with external agencies including referral to child and adolescent health services (CAMHS) and the local authority designated officer (LADO) for safeguarding. Training for other staff and for governors is conducted regularly as required. It is effective and includes informal updates.
- 2.5 Staff are knowledgeable about changes in recent legislation, including the management of children's mental wellbeing, contextual safeguarding, child-on-child abuse, sexual harassment and sexual violence. They understand the principles underpinning the staff code of conduct and the procedures for making a referral, including the importance of low-level reporting. They are confident about using whistleblowing procedures. Discussions with staff confirmed that training is thorough and safeguarding effectively managed. Senior leaders take appropriate action if any perceived breach of the staff code of conduct occurs, or an allegation is received with regard to an adult who works with children. They understand their responsibility to make referrals to relevant statutory bodies once investigations by external agencies are completed.
- 2.6 The governor responsible for safeguarding meets regularly with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputies. This maintains effective oversight of safeguarding policies and their implementation throughout the whole school including early years. Reports are given regularly to the governing board by the safeguarding governor and the DSL. These highlight appropriate details of any safeguarding incidents which occur, including during trips and outside of school. This ensures that governors have an appropriate level of understanding, scrutiny and oversight. In addition to continuous monitoring, a suitable annual review of safeguarding is undertaken.
- 2.7 Pupils stated confidently that they know how to stay safe, including online. They confirmed that they can talk to staff if they are worried or concerned, including those based in the wellbeing room. Any concerns raised are monitored and acted upon by the DSL. Records confirm that when pupils raise a concern, they receive a timely response and action is taken where needed. Monitoring and filtering of technology is effective.
- 2.8 The current arrangements are likely to meet the needs of the proposed increase in the number of pupils, including in early years.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – health and safety [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 11]

- 2.9 The school meets the standard.
- 2.10 The school has an appropriate policy for health and safety which is reviewed and updated regularly. It is implemented consistently and effectively. Senior leaders and governors monitor all aspects of health and safety regularly. Those responsible for day-to-day operations provide detailed reports. These include the completion of required maintenance logs and records of work carried out by internal maintenance staff and by contractors. The roles and responsibilities of staff and governors for health and safety are stated clearly and there is appropriate delegation of duties and training. Relevant senior staff, along with premises staff, know the pre-prep and prep school areas well and are aware of potential risks and hazards. Appropriate checks of school vehicles and drivers are undertaken which include the issue of annual driving permits. The school has a comprehensive asbestos management plan and appropriate measures are taken to ensure safe control and storage of hazardous substances (COSHH). Maintenance logs are used effectively by premises staff to prioritise work schedules and respond to emergencies without delay.
- 2.11 The current arrangements are likely to meet the needs of the proposed increase in the number of pupils.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – fire safety [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 12]

- 2.12 The school meets the standard.
- 2.13 The school has a suitable fire risk policy which is reviewed and updated annually. The school's fire risk assessment is undertaken by a suitably qualified person. It is reviewed regularly, and any recommendations are implemented without delay. Appropriate fire procedures are implemented. Competent persons have been appointed to assist in taking preventative and protective measures including ensuring that all parts of the buildings are evacuated if there is a fire. Regular and suitable training is in place for staff and for those with responsibilities, including fire marshals.
- 2.14 Staff, pupils and visitors are provided with appropriate fire safety information, including how to evacuate buildings and where the fire assembly points are located. Regular fire drills are conducted at different times of the day. These are recorded accurately, including the time it takes for evacuation, any concerns, and any improvements that need to be made. Suitable emergency exits, escape routes and signage are in place. Effective monitoring systems ensure that these are maintained consistently to the required standards. Fire equipment including extinguishers and alarms are checked regularly by external contractors. Records of all fire safety checks are maintained appropriately and monitored by governors.
- 2.15 The current arrangements are likely to meet the needs of the proposed increase in the number of pupils.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – supervision of pupils [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 14]

- 2.16 The school meets the standard.
- 2.17 The school has a suitable policy for supervising pupils that is implemented effectively across the whole school site. Staff receive guidance during induction and ongoing revision is provided in the staff code of conduct and in regular updates. Staff have clear job descriptions detailing their supervision duties. Comprehensive duty rotas cover all areas of the school, different times of day and different times of the year. They take into account the age, number and needs of pupils and the locations and activities involved. Monitoring by senior staff ensures that supervision is effective, and that cover is put in place without delay if it is required.

- 2.18 The current arrangements are likely to meet the needs of the proposed increase in the number of pupils.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – risk assessment [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 16]

- 2.19 The school meets the standard.
- 2.20 There are suitable policy and procedures with regard to risk assessment. Risk assessments are recorded electronically and monitored effectively by the safeguarding, health and safety committee. There are clear lines of responsibility for assessing risk. Subject leaders, including those responsible for early years, oversee risk assessments effectively. Senior leaders monitor those for off-site trips. Individual care plans include the effective assessment of risk for vulnerable pupils. Risk assessments are reviewed regularly, and appropriate action taken where required to reduce risk. The school has completed an effective risk assessment to identify how the proposed increase in numbers would affect school facilities. It has put suitable procedures in place as a result which include increasing capacity in existing buildings.
- 2.21 The planning and procedures for offsite visits are detailed and clear with appropriate checks and approval in place. Parents are suitably informed of arrangements for school trips including behaviour expectations, safeguarding procedures, activities and travel details. Risk assessments are amended if changes occur. Any changes to arrangements are communicated to parents without delay.
- 2.22 Staff confirmed that they had received training regarding the completion of risk assessments, including those for offsite visits and residential. They are confident in completing them, including those for trips and hazardous activities.
- 2.23 The current arrangements are likely to meet the needs of the proposed increase in the number of pupils.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors [ISSR Part 4, paragraphs 18–21]

- 2.24 The school meets the standards.
- 2.25 There is a suitable recruitment policy in place which covers the required recruitment checks and procedures. This is implemented effectively. All staff, governors and persons engaged in regulated activity are checked and recorded appropriately on the single central register of appointments (SCR). Those responsible for carrying out the required recruitment checks and the maintenance of staff records ensure that checks and evidence are in place prior to commencing work in the school. Appropriate procedures are in place for managing contractors including ensuring that they are accompanied at all times if not checked by the school.
- 2.26 The current arrangements are likely to meet the needs of the proposed increase in the number of pupils.

Premises and accommodation – toilets and changing accommodation; medical facilities; maintenance; acoustics; lighting; water supply and outdoor space [ISSR Part 5, paragraphs 23-29]

- 2.27 The school meets the standards.
- 2.28 Suitable policies and procedures are in place which ensure that the school premises and accommodation and facilities are maintained to a standard where the health, safety and welfare of pupils is ensured as far as possible. There are sufficient designated toilet and changing facilities

throughout the school currently. Suitable disabled facilities are available for staff and visitors. These, together with facilities installed in the refurbished rooms and the planned renovation of existing buildings are sufficient to accommodate the proposed increase in pupil numbers, including in the early years. In particular, the school plans relocation of rooms such as the music room; the re-design of existing boardroom; classrooms and office space as well as the refurbishment of classrooms in the prep school. Plans also outline the effective management of existing communal spaces, such as the dining room, which will be extended into an atrium area during summer 2024, and playground areas to cater suitably for the proposed increase in numbers.

- 2.29 Suitable accommodation is provided for the medical examination and treatment of pupils and for the short-term care of sick or injured pupils in the school's healthcare centre. There is also a suitably equipped wellbeing room called 'the lighthouse'. The school site is appropriately secure. All visitors are required to sign into the main office and are accompanied at all times. Acoustics, lighting, and water supply are appropriate throughout the school. There is sufficient space for outdoor play and sports.
- 2.30 The current arrangements are likely to meet the needs of the proposed increase in the number of pupils.

Provision of information [ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c)]

- 2.31 The school meets the requirements for providing information relating to safeguarding to parents. Particulars of the arrangements for safeguarding are published on the school's website.

Manner in which complaints are handled [ISSR Part 7, paragraph 33]

- 2.32 The school meets the standard.
- 2.33 The school has an appropriate policy for recording and responding to complaints from parents. The school policy for handling parental complaints provides that complaints if any, are handled 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 timescales and, at the third stage, the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. The arrangements are implemented effectively. The handling of all complaints received since the previous inspection followed the school's policy.

Quality of leadership and management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34]

- 2.34 The school meets the standard.
- 2.35 Senior leaders and the governors, including those with specific responsibilities for safeguarding and the early years, demonstrate good skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that all the other standards are met consistently, and they actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils.

3. Recommendation with regard to material change inspection

Recommendation

3.1 It is recommended that the request to increase capacity from 650 to 664 is granted.

4. Summary of evidence

- 4.1 The inspector held discussions with the head, senior leaders and other members of staff and met with the chair and one other governor. He visited different areas of the school, observed lessons and talked with groups of pupils. He scrutinised a range of documentation, records and policies.