

The Blue Coat School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	137133
Local authority	Not Applicable
Inspection number	385575
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2011
Reporting inspector	John Peckham HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,448
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	342
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Lees
Headteacher	Julie Hollis
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Egerton Street Oldham OL1 3SQ
Telephone number	0161 624 1484
Fax number	0161 628 4997
Email address	secretary@blue-coat.org

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. A total of 45 lessons, taught by 44 teachers was observed. Inspectors met with groups of students, staff, senior managers and members of the governing body. They looked at policies and procedures including those for safeguarding, behaviour and anti-bullying. The daily work and routines of the school were observed and inspectors reviewed records of assessment both in written work and using the school's virtual learning environment. A total of 369 questionnaire responses from parents and carers, 41 from staff and 129 from students was taken into account.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The improvements in the quality of learning and progress being made by all students since the previous inspection.
- The effectiveness of the school's systems to promote behaviour that supports good learning.
- The quality of the school's engagement with parents and carers.

Information about the school

The Blue Coat School is much larger than most secondary schools and draws students from a wide geographical area. There are more girls than boys in the school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is about the same as in most schools with few students learning English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in the whole school is below average, although the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs being admitted in Year 7 has grown in recent years and in Key Stage 3 is above average. Just over a quarter of the students in the sixth form joined the school at this stage. This is a Church of England school which became an academy on 1 August 2011. It has specialist status in science with mathematics and is a Training School. It has achieved Healthy School status, Sportsmark, Investors in People, Eco-Schools awards and TES Arts Award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Students and staff at this outstanding school provide ample evidence of applying its ethos of 'Faith, Vision, Nurture' to all that they do. Regardless of their background, all students are warmly welcomed and quickly integrated to the life of the school. They are happy, secure and exceptionally positive about their learning. There is a high degree of involvement in school decision making and in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities available. All the school's outcomes are outstanding; students make excellent progress academically and in developing a wide range of skills and attitudes that prepare them thoroughly for life beyond school. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and other groups, such as students known to be eligible for free school meals, make much better progress than in other schools nationally, demonstrating the school's outstanding commitment to promoting equal opportunities.

The school's sustained outstanding performance is substantially due to the modest, self-effacing yet inspirational leadership of the headteacher. Supported by an outstanding governing body, she has promoted an extraordinary level of shared ambition on the part of all staff to be the best they can be. This is demonstrated in consistent work to develop a variety of teaching strategies and techniques that provide students with lessons that they enjoy and in which they can make good progress. Staff feel as cared for and supported as the students. Procedures to ensure the safeguarding of students are exemplary and rigorous. Most teachers have been able to take part in observations of others as part of the school's elaborate and rigorous quality assurance processes. Leaders and managers have a very clear understanding of the current strengths of the school and have also conducted a detailed analysis of areas for development. They have, for example, correctly identified the increased number and changing complexity of needs of students with statements of special educational needs and/or disabilities who have joined the school in the last three years. Having recognised that current provision needs to be improved to meet their needs, the school is planning how to achieve this. There is no complacency and, as a result, the school sustains an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

A positive vision for the future informs the highly effective care, guidance and support provided for students. Subject choices for entry to Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are guided to ensure students keep open as many future pathways as possible. Students who aspire to gain places in the most competitive courses at university are

given good support and encouragement well ahead of key decisions so that they are thoroughly prepared. The curriculum provides a high degree of flexibility and choice so that students are able to pursue their interests and maintain a broad and balanced programme that maximises future options. There are outstanding opportunities for students to develop skills as leaders and future citizens. Many students are regularly involved in coaching others, sometimes as part of ordinary lessons, or through structured activities such as coaching younger students in mathematics and science. Large numbers of students participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and the school's citizenship programme encourages an understanding of and participation in local and national communities. The school's specialism in science with mathematics is evident in extensive work with other schools such as the 'Maths Roadshow' where Years 8 and 9 tour local primary schools. In school it has an impact in a number of ways, for example, in the Year 9 science and technology project undertaken in the annual 'special curriculum' week. It also makes a significant contribution to the overall culture of enquiry and discovery evident in many subjects.

The sixth form has sustained a year-on-year improvement in examination performance over the last four years. Students are gaining more qualifications at higher grades. Sixth-form students provide responsible, adult role models around the school and are a positive inspiration to younger students. Many also develop their active citizenship through community service outside school or in the mentoring of younger students.

The Christian faith is strongly evident throughout the school. The school sustains good links with its local parishes and the wider Anglican community around the world. The social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of students is outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the requirements of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are effectively met in the future through:
 - researching best practice in the integration of students with complex special needs into mainstream classes
 - continuing training for staff at all levels
 - reviewing structures and systems in learning support to build capacity for further improvement.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students join this school with prior attainment which is significantly above average. There is an obvious enthusiasm in students' enjoyment of their learning. They maintain high levels of curiosity and engagement and make excellent progress. GCSE examination results remain consistently high and improved further in 2011 despite a slightly lower prior attainment of this year group. Qualifications routes are carefully designed to suit the needs of students to ensure that all can sustain the highest levels of progress. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are

fully integrated into the life of the school. In some cases, for example, in the Duke of Edinburgh Award expeditions and school trips, exceptional efforts are made by the school to ensure that there are as few barriers to participation as possible. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of students with a statement of special educational need, some with a greater complexity of needs than the school has previously dealt with. Teachers are not always provided with the most helpful advice in individual education plans, to ensure that these young people are not only included (which they are) but are also able to make good progress.

The school's policy to promote good manners and respect helps to create a highly positive ethos. Students' excellent behaviour often reflects that of staff, whose own conduct is an exemplary model. Students report very few incidents of bullying; they have high levels of confidence in the school to resolve matters and can talk with pride about the mentor scheme that relies upon Years 9 and 10 students. Students have a great deal of knowledge and understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and many choose healthy food in the canteen, walk to school and participate in sporting and other physical activity beyond the curriculum. They are also well informed about the risks of substance misuse and aspects of sexual behaviour. The school promotes through the well-being programme, awareness of mental and emotional health issues such as peer pressure and achieving a good work/life balance. Students in all age groups are encouraged to make a positive contribution to the school and the community through activities ranging from support in local primary schools to extensive 'active citizenship' involvement in local hospitals and homes for the elderly. There are many opportunities for the views of students in all year groups to be conveyed to leaders and managers through the consultation processes run by the sixth form.

Students are enabled to develop skills beneficial to their future economic well-being. They are excellent listeners; they speak confidently, collaborate well in learning and often take on coaching roles with other students. Attendance is high and skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are well developed. There are also good opportunities for students to develop and practise enterprise skills such as those involved in developing fund-raising ideas for charities. The curriculum supports the outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students through a range of opportunities to engage with, discuss and reflect upon many aspects of life. For example, Year 8 students spend a week in Normandy on a highly effective programme combining geography, history, religious studies, French and mathematics linked to the theme of the Normandy landings. The school's hardship fund ensures that no child is unable to attend for financial reasons.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	1
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is characterised by excellent relationships between teachers and students and extremely positive attitudes to learning. Teachers regularly employ a range of techniques so that lessons are active, interesting and informative. In the best lessons these activities are fine-tuned to meet the individual needs of the students. Teachers use sophisticated questioning techniques to check and reinforce students' understanding. Students are encouraged to develop independent learning skills and also to work in pairs or small groups when appropriate. For example, in a Year 11 geography lesson exploring plate tectonics, students were expected to work in groups to identify from illustrations, the type of plate movement taking place. Groups had been carefully constructed to enable some students to take on a coaching role – reinforcing their own understanding whilst also assisting others. Each group then made a shared presentation to the class. In the small minority of satisfactory lessons, there is insufficient allowance made for the learning needs of students of all abilities or the activities, whilst engaging, do not promote the most effective learning of the subject.

Teachers have a good knowledge of their students and the progress that they are making. This is supported by regular graded assessment tasks, which form the basis of marks that are reported to students and parents and carers in Key Stages 4 and 5, and biannually in Key Stage 3. Most books are regularly marked and students are provided with helpful comments. Increasingly, the school's virtual learning environment is being used to store assessed work and comments so that students and parents and carers can access it at any time. Students in general have a good understanding of their current attainment and what they need to do to improve. They are also skilled in self- and peer-assessment, practising these skills in most lessons. Some students and parents and carers said that they would value more frequent feedback about progress. Inspectors judged that whilst marking and assessment in most subjects is highly effective, there is scope to ensure that the best practice, particularly in linking individual lesson objectives to assessment grades, is spread to the whole school.

Although many students attain high levels in their GCSEs and A levels, the school also provides well for students who do not find academic work easy. The curriculum seeks to ensure all can be successful by offering a variety of courses and programmes that promote success. Some of these, such as horticulture, are organised in conjunction with the local parks department and a college and provide a strong element of work-related skills and potential for future employment. Others, such as astronomy and the 'maths challenge' offer enrichment and extension. The variety of subjects on offer and the enormous scope of additional activities, mean

that most students are extremely happy with the choices available to them. Participation in voluntary activities, sporting, musical and cultural is exceptionally high.

The school has developed highly effective programmes to manage the transition of students from many primary schools into Year 7, from Year 9 into GCSE programmes in Years 10 and 11 and into and when leaving the sixth form. The high quality of care, guidance and support helps to generate a strong sense of belonging in students. They are confident and secure. The school frequently demonstrates its commitment to ensure every student's success through the outstanding support offered to those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, or who are facing particular challenges. There is excellent practice in the links with other agencies across the local area to support children and their families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has encouraged and developed a skilled and well-motivated team to lead the school. Together they have built upon the work of the already highly successful school and sustained improvement in almost all areas of its work. There is an exceptional commitment to ensure the very best quality outcomes for all students, which inspires staff at all levels to want to be and do better. A very high number of lesson observations has helped to build a strong and common understanding of what makes excellent teaching and learning. Staff development has been relentless in focussing on the pursuit of outstanding teaching. Senior and middle leaders share a clear idea about what constitutes good learning and, as a result, the school has an extremely accurate picture of its current strengths. Leaders are supported by an exceptionally able and well-informed governing body that has a clear vision for the future of the school.

The strong Christian ethos of care for all, which is woven into all elements of the school's life and activity, has helped to ensure outstanding promotion of equal opportunities. Students are helped to gain a clear understanding of diversity and the principle that everyone is to be equally valued. Students from all backgrounds perform much better at The Blue Coat School than nationally, because the school carefully monitors each student's progress and supports and intervenes when individuals fall behind.

The school's policies and practices in safeguarding are exemplary, in school, in the immediate environment of the school and on extra-curricular activities. There is a clear understanding of the potential risks to students' safety and well-being, with appropriate safeguards in place. Within a challenging local context, the school has made strenuous efforts to engage effectively with the ethnically diverse communities

evident in the immediate and wider locality. All Year 7 students, for example, complete some outreach work in mathematics as part of the school's specialism. This involves completing a series of mathematical puzzles working with Year 6 pupils from a local school who are almost all of Asian heritage. There is also some excellent practice in the sixth form, with over half the students trained to lead philosophy sessions for primary school children, bringing them into direct contact with a wide range of local children.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The sixth form provides an outstanding learning experience for students. While it operates as an integral part of the whole school, the provision has been very carefully crafted to provide an appropriate set of distinct experiences to match the needs of the students. Examination results have risen steadily each year in the recent past. This is as a result of clear and decisive leadership, driving up the quality of teaching, curriculum and care, guidance and support. All students start their year 12 programme with five AS levels, including citizenship. This provides a platform to ensure that students are not only developing their academic skills but are also providing evidence of broadened experience that will prepare them to progress, either as the majority does to university, or into employment. A quite exceptional programme of fortnightly lectures, links current academic research to the developing needs of sixth-form students. These are followed up by form tutors as part of their active tutoring and mentoring of students. For example, Carol Dweck's research on 'growth mindset' is explored in a lecture. Students then consider their own responses to being set challenging work and use this to build their resilience and determination. The guidance available to students from early in Year 11 in relation to subject choices and university entrance is exemplary. Excellent use is made of external support, such as a sports psychologist from a local premieriership football club, to provide motivational and other support to individuals.

Teaching in the sixth form is amongst the best in the school. Strong specialist subject knowledge and high quality, staff-student relationships are supported by a variety of teaching methods so that learning progresses rapidly. Students' progress is carefully monitored and action to support any who are falling behind is swift and decisive.

Students speak very positively about the help that they have experienced either in their studies or when external circumstances have created difficulties. The balance of students' time between taught lessons, opportunities for independent learning and wider aspects of development is well managed, supporting students' excellent moral and intellectual growth. Students are able to choose from over 30 subjects offered at AS and A level and are provided with information and guidance on issues such as alcohol misuse, sexual health and road safety through their well-being lessons.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are extraordinarily strong. The head of sixth form takes responsibility for all aspects of provision post-16 and works proactively to improve teaching and curriculum management with departments where necessary. A moral commitment to students' personal development and wellbeing is supported by clarity of intellectual thought and sufficient rigour to ensure the quality of provision necessary to create the outstanding outcomes.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth Form	1
Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The majority of views expressed by parents and carers was exceptionally positive. Many also wrote specific comments about how satisfied they were with the school, their children's progress and the positive ethos.

A small number of more specific concerns was expressed. One related to students with special educational needs. The school's identification of the need to improve provision in this area is evident in this report. Some parents and carers said that they could better support their children's learning if they had more information about the curriculum and their child's progress. The continued promotion of parental access to the 'virtual learning environment' and the improvement of information provided through it is intended to help to address some of these concerns.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Blue Coat CoFE School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 369 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,438 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	224	61	138	37	3	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	241	65	124	34	2	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	195	53	153	41	17	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	202	55	151	41	6	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	229	62	134	36	2	1	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	163	44	179	49	14	4	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	148	40	205	56	10	3	1	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	194	53	150	41	5	1	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	199	54	155	42	8	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	196	53	154	42	4	1	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	143	39	186	50	8	2	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	243	66	115	31	3	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	258	70	103	28	2	1	1	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12 December 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The Blue Coat School, Oldham, OL1 3SQ

Thank you for the warm welcome that you offered me and my fellow inspectors when we visited your school recently. In particular I would like to thank those who spent time talking with inspectors or showing them to parts of the site.

The school is outstanding in every respect. There is ample evidence that the school's ethos, 'Faith, Vision, Nurture' is woven into every aspect of school life. Teaching is exceptionally good and this is supported by excellent behaviour and a positive enthusiasm for learning. Relationships are very good and most students feel safe and really enjoy going to school. There are a wide and appropriate range of courses for students to choose from, at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Students make excellent progress in their learning at all stages. Many students also participate in one or more of the wealth of clubs and activities on offer beyond the normal school day. The care, guidance and support available to help students from the transition into Year 7, through any potential difficulties in school, to the transition into work, further education or university is exceptional. Many students take full advantage of the opportunities to take on responsibilities and to be involved in the school or the community. There is daily involvement in assessing progress, in mentoring and coaching or in leading activities and group work. The sixth form provides particularly rich opportunities, helping students to be exceptionally well prepared for entry to even the most competitive of university courses.

The headteacher and her senior team provide excellent leadership for the school. Together they have helped teachers and other staff to improve the school continually and to aspire to be even better. To improve further, we have asked the school to develop the provision for students with more complex special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Congratulations on the part that all of you have played in helping your school to be outstanding, please accept my best wishes for your future success.

Yours sincerely

John Peckham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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