

The Blue Coat School

Church Road, Wavertree, Liverpool, L15 9EE

Inspection dates 31 October–1 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Outstanding 1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Blue Coat is an outstanding school in which students thrive and flourish. Standards are exceptionally high across all subjects, particularly in mathematics, business studies and information and communication technology (ICT) and in science.
- All groups of students including boys, girls, students from different backgrounds and ethnic heritages all make outstanding progress.
- The school's main asset is the quality of its students. Their behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding, which means teachers are able to teach lessons without any disruption to learning.
- Students were full of praise for the school and made comments such as: 'This school is challenging, but good fun', 'we always feel safe in this friendly environment'.
- Teachers' expectations are exceptionally high. They have excellent knowledge of their own subjects. They gauge students' understanding through high-quality questioning and move students' on quickly to the next step in their understanding.
- Teaching is outstanding because senior leaders have very high expectations. There is a relentless but supportive focus on each teacher improving their teaching in order to teach high-quality lessons.
- The headteacher and the team of leaders are highly-skilled, open and honest. They have established a culture of always looking for ways to improve and not resting on previous success. They are supported very well by highly trained teachers who lead year groups or subjects.
- The governing body oversees the school's work and gives exceptional challenge and support. There is a significant focus on accountability at all levels and governors have helped the school to improve students' achievement.
- The sixth form is outstanding. The A and AS level examination results are well above the national average and all groups of students make outstanding progress. There are high-quality lessons and the subjects students take are matched closely to their needs and interests.
- Almost every parent who completed the online questionnaire said they would recommend Blue Coat School. Inspectors agree: it is a school where you would want any of your children to be educated because it is a place in which everyone succeeds.
- All staff work hard to promote equality and eliminate any discrimination and ensure every student achieves. The school fulfils its motto: *Non sibi sed omnibus* (not for oneself but for all).

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 39 lessons, which included nine lessons in the sixth form. They observed an assembly and five registration periods. Inspectors observed four of the lessons jointly with the headteacher or with one of the deputy headteachers.
- Inspectors held a meeting with two governors and a meeting with the School Improvement Partner (who provides external support and challenge to the school). They held meetings with 10 groups of students; with teachers who are in charge of the year groups; and with a group of teachers who lead their subject departments.
- Inspectors took into account the views of 111 parents who completed Ofsted’s online survey, (Parent View) They also took into account the views of parents from the school’s own surveys. They considered the Ofsted surveys complete by 63 staff.
- Inspectors looked at documentation including: the school’s plans for improvement; records of lesson observations; results of tests and examinations and attendance records.

Inspection team

Allan Torr, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Bernard Robinson

Additional Inspector

Michael Cooper

Additional Inspector

Michael McLachlan

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Blue Coat School is larger than the average sized secondary school. It converted into an academy on 1 March 2012, so this inspection is its first since opening as a new school.
- Students are selected by ability on entry into Year 7 through entrance examinations. In 2012 there were over 700 applications for 120 places indicating the school is highly popular and over-subscribed.
- The proportion of boys is higher than the national average.
- The pupil premium is an amount of money allocated to the school by the government to support students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, or who are in the care of the local authority or are children of service families. In 2012 the school was allocated £16,000. The proportion of students at Blue Coat supported by this money is much lower than the national average.
- Approximately one quarter of students is from minority ethnic heritages, of which Chinese and Indian heritage students form the largest groups.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of students who need extra support from the school because they are disabled or have special educational needs (school action) is much lower than the national average. There are no students who have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of students who have been identified to need support from specialist teachers through 'school action plus' is much lower than the national average.
- No students are educated off site (alternative provision).
- The school exceeds the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations of students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching in lessons by:
 - increasing students' involvement in lessons so that they have more opportunities to explain their answers, ideas, thinking and their reasoning
 - giving students more time to follow up the teachers' marking and feedback and to revisit and improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students make outstanding progress at Blue Coat. They are articulate, have an extensive vocabulary, and are ambitious for the future. They use their wider learning, reading and knowledge in discussions. In a history lesson for example, a Year 8 student, in discussion about child labour in the nineteenth century, commented that in the Victorian era there was a different view of childhood. She made excellent comments about the different social attitudes about how people treated children in education and in society. Similarly, in a mathematics lesson a Year 9 student in her answer articulated the difference between qualitative and quantitative data.
- Almost every student in the last three years has attained five GCSEs, including English and mathematics, in the range of grades A* to C. Compared to the national average, a very high proportion of students attained the higher grades of A* or A, particularly in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), chemistry, business studies, design and technology and physics. Across the school in every year group, standards are exceptionally high.
- The few students with a disability or who are identified as having special educational needs make outstanding progress. Almost all attain as many GCSEs as their peers. They receive extra support if they need it, for example, extra lessons in English and a modified curriculum, to make sure they succeed. Teachers' high expectations are a key factor in the success of this group. All students, including those with social or learning difficulties are expected to, and shown how to, achieve at the highest level.
- Boys' attainment is well above average. They make rapid progress because the content of lessons is challenging and meets their needs. One student commented, 'Teachers push us to do our best but we are not pressured too much'. There is little difference between the attainment or progress between boys and girls.
- Students known to be eligible for free school meals achieve very well at Blue Coat. Average-points scores are a measure that schools use to compare students' achievements with other schools and with different groups of students. The average points scores for students for whom the school has received pupil premium funds is significantly higher than average. The difference between this group's achievement and the group who are not supported by this money is small. The reason for this is that pupil premium funding is allocated well to support and increase students' achievement and to provide high-quality teaching. One student commented, 'Teachers are a cut above here', and another said, 'School helps me so much to overcome problems'. The school has also used the money to support and improve students' attendance and financed educational activities and events off-site, for which cost could be a barrier.
- Students from different ethnic backgrounds attain high standards and make excellent progress. There is little difference between the attainment or achievement of different groups, including students who speak English as an additional language, which is reflected in a comment made by a student, 'School is incredibly supportive and there is always help no matter what our background'. The school takes very effective steps to make sure there are good relationships between all students and that there is no discrimination.
- Almost all students at the end of their AS levels carry on to complete their A levels, which is a much higher proportion than average. Over 85% of students (well above average) leave the sixth form to go to university and higher education. Eleven students last year started their studies at either Oxford or Cambridge University.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the Ofsted survey agreed that their children are happy at Blue Coat. Their responses also confirm that, they make good progress and their children are well taught. Inspectors agreed. In fact, the relentlessly good and outstanding teaching enables students to make outstanding progress.

- In a French lesson in the sixth form about reducing the carbon footprint, the teacher had very high expectations of students. She skilfully used a variety of resources and teaching methods to involve students throughout the lesson. She checked on students' learning throughout making interventions to speed up or slow down the teaching to make sure all students could make rapid progress. This lesson reflects the characteristics of outstanding teaching observed during the inspection.
- In the better lessons, teachers used questioning well to gauge students' understanding and to deepen their knowledge and their thinking. Teachers checked on students' learning throughout the lesson and took action to tackle any mistakes, misunderstandings or lack of knowledge. In these lessons, students had the opportunity to be fully involved throughout contributing their ideas, thinking and explaining their answers and their reasoning. In these highly effective lessons teachers used every opportunity to extend students' literacy, speaking and numeracy skills.
- In a mathematics lesson, the teacher skilfully asked questions to lead students towards an understanding of bias and leading questions in surveys. All students were fully involved throughout this exciting lesson, which involved writing answers on their own whiteboards, explaining their reasoning to partners and collaborating in groups on mathematics problems relating to a real-life issue. Consequently, they made rapid progress in their understanding.
- In a few lessons, the teaching was good or required improvement because students were not fully involved and spent too long listening to the teacher. In these lessons, students did not have enough chance to deepen their thinking, explain their ideas, answers or their reasoning.
- Most students knew of their targets in each subject and what they had to do to achieve them. For example, teachers in the history department, use a highly effective system to assess students. It enables students to clearly identify what they need to do to reach the next level and it enables them to be able to track and take responsibility for their own progress and learning.
- Marking and feedback to students about how well they are doing is improving. In some subjects, the marking explains clearly what needs to be improved. Nevertheless, there is still some work to do so that in all subjects students are able to follow up on the teachers' marking and to use the feedback to revisit and improve their work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Almost every parent who replied to Ofsted's online survey agreed that the school makes sure students are well behaved. The large majority of staff also agreed that behaviour is good and the overwhelming view from students themselves is that behaviour is at least good and often better.
- Around the school, in corridors and at break and lunch times, students' behaviour is excellent. They moderate their own behaviour and show high levels of self-discipline and responsibility.
- Students' impeccable behaviour in lessons is a key factor in their high achievement because they are keen, ready and enthusiastic to learn. They respond well to newly-qualified, experienced and supply teachers and show high levels of respect for adults and for each other at all times. A key strength of the school is the highly professional relationship teachers have with students, as one student commented, 'it is the bond between teacher and student that makes this school great and helps us to learn'.
- Bullying incidents are very rare. When they do occur, they are followed up very well by the deputy headteacher who checks regularly after any incident that the action taken has been successful and that the students' behaviour has improved. Students across the school confirmed that bullying is a very rare occurrence at Blue Coat.
- Different groups of students confirmed that racist incidents are also very rare, as are different forms of discrimination, for example, because of a student's background, faith, belief, disability or their special educational needs. Some students said there was some inappropriate use of the term 'gay' to mean something was rubbish but they were adamant that students who were

lesbian or gay would be safe and could be themselves at Blue Coat.

- Students' said they felt safe in school and this was also reflected in the responses from staff and from parents. They had a detailed knowledge about how to stay safe on the internet and how to avoid gangs and crime.
- Students' attendance is well above average. It is also higher than average for students who are eligible for free school meals, for boys and for students from minority ethnic backgrounds. Persistent absence is low because the school has used some of its pupil premium funding to support students with lower than expected attendance.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- 'Satisfactory' and 'good' are not enough for leaders at Blue Coat. There is a relentless focus on each aspect of the school's work, on every subject department and on each teacher to be outstanding. The headteacher is supported exceptionally well by the team of deputy and assistant headteachers, heads of subjects and heads of year. Together, they have an excellent focus on doing everything they can to ensure every student succeeds.
- The headteacher has an accurate view of the school's work and all the senior leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. This accuracy enables leaders to clearly identify what each teacher needs to do to improve their teaching. The 'outstanding teaching and learning group' has been effective in improving the quality of teaching, sharing good practice and in showing teachers what outstanding teaching looks like.
- The headteacher takes performance management extremely seriously. High performing teachers, who achieve and exceed their targets, are rewarded financially. In contrast, teachers who underperform do not progress on the pay scale. For example, where teaching by an individual was identified as less than good and students' progress was not as good as it could be, the senior leaders and governors declined a pay rise to the teacher.
- There is a good focus on professional development. As one teacher commented, 'This school is led in a rigorous but humane way where individual professionalism is expected and encouraged'.
- Leaders at every level in the school are accountable for students' achievement. They check on students' progress regularly observe teachers in lessons and take swift action if there are any signs that a student is off course to meet their target grades. There is a policy of not entering students early for examinations because leaders want to ensure each student has a greater depth of knowledge and understanding.
- The curriculum (the subjects that are taught in school) is of a high quality. It provides highly positive and rich learning experiences for all groups of students, which enhances their understanding. It is also flexible, so some students who struggle at English receive extra lessons; students who are struggling with the amount of subjects have a reduced number of GCSE subjects and some other students who need extra challenge have the opportunity to learn new subjects, including Latin and Mandarin.
- In the sixth form, students can choose the subjects they take without restrictions from the school's timetable. The timetable is built around the students and as such meets their needs and interests outstandingly well.
- The safeguarding (care and protection) of students is a very high priority in the school. There are strong systems in place to make sure staff and visitors are vetted to be able to work with students; to make sure all staff are trained in child protection and to make sure everyone is safe.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students have excellent opportunities to consider and discuss moral dilemmas and complex issues in form time and other subjects. In a history lesson, for example, about prohibition and White supremacy in America, students maturely considered whether it was always right to obey the law.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a detailed and sophisticated knowledge and understanding about the school.

In a recent meeting about standards, for example, governors produced an impressive list of detailed and well thought-out questions. They challenged senior leaders to explain differences in examination results between departments, any changes in standards and any differences between the achievement of different groups of students. They have a good overview of the quality of teaching. The governors make highly effective decisions about how money is spent to improve aspects of the school. This includes making decisions in line with teachers' performance. They have an increasing knowledge about how the pupil premium funding is spent and have started to check the impact of this money on students' achievement.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137916
Local authority	Not applicable
Inspection number	473720

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

Type of school	Academy converter
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	996
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	380
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Julia Shaw
Headteacher	Mrs Debbie Silcock
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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