

The Blue Coat CofE School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105739
Local Authority	Oldham
Inspection number	308941
Inspection date	28 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Janet Palmer HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1372
6th form	263
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	
Headteacher	Mrs J Hollis
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2004
School address	Egerton Street Oldham Lancashire OL1 3SQ
Telephone number	0161 6241484
Fax number	0161 6284997

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. The inspection focused on the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; the personal development and well-being of students; the quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum; the care, guidance and support provided by the school; and the quality of leadership and management. This was done by scrutinising school documentation and other published assessment data; observing lessons; looking at students' work; interviewing pupils, staff, the chair of governors, the school improvement partner and the headteacher; and by analysing questionnaires completed by parents.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but HMI found good evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Students at the Blue Coat Church of England School are drawn from a wide geographical area and from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. It is a larger than average school with more girls than boys, particularly in the sixth form. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below the national average, as is the proportion eligible for free school meals. There are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds or in the early stages of learning English. The sixth form is comprised predominantly of Blue Coat students, although there are an increasing number entering the sixth form from other schools. The school has been granted specialist school status in science and mathematics. It holds Healthy Schools, Sportsmark, Investors in People and Eco Schools awards.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Blue Coat Church of England School provides an outstanding education. The exceptional leadership of the headteacher and her senior team is a significant factor in the continued success of the school. Added to this is the positive effect of a well organised governing body that challenges rigorously as well as providing very good support. Standards are outstanding, students make good progress and their personal development is exemplary. Care, guidance and support are outstanding and contribute significantly to the pupils' enjoyment and well-being. Consequently, Blue Coat pupils make the most of the high quality provision offered to them.

Standards are outstanding at the Blue Coat school. Progress is good during Key Stage 4 where, in 2007, three quarters of students secured good GCSE grades, including in English and mathematics. Students enter the school with standards above the national average, and, overall, progress is good between Years 7 and 11. Standards in Key Stage 3 are above average; however, the 2007 Key Stage 3 results did not match the school's expectations. Reliable school tracking data shows that current Key Stage 3 students are now making good progress. Students' academic progress is carefully tracked and an effective level of additional support is provided for those pupils that the school has identified might be at risk of not meeting their targets. More vulnerable students, such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, looked-after children and young carers, make good progress. There is no significant difference in the attainment of girls and boys.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students have highly developed spiritual, moral and social awareness. This is evidenced by their courtesy to staff and each other, their eagerness to take on responsibilities and their high personal aspirations. Students enjoy their time at school very much. Attendance is well above average, and students take full advantage of the outstanding extra-curricular provision and the many opportunities to make a positive contribution to the school and wider community. Students speak positively about the healthy options in the school's impressive dining area and large numbers attend the exciting range of out of school sporting activities. They are rightly proud of their school which they report to be a place of safety where they feel valued as individuals. They commented that bullying was rare and was effectively dealt with by the school.

The school provides an excellent curriculum to meet the range of students' needs. The Foundation Sets in Years 7 and 8 help to support those requiring extra help with literacy. Information and communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum are supported through an accelerated programme at Key Stage 3, and an E-Learning programme at Key Stage 4. The curriculum is designed to ensure inclusiveness for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those identified as gifted and talented. Through courses such as the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness and personalised learning programmes, the school ensures that the needs of the less able are well met. Through the work of the science and mathematics specialisms, students engage in many cross-curricular projects and out of school activities. Students develop work-related skills via a range of school and college-based vocational options at Key Stage 4, enterprise and business awareness immersion days, industry links, work experience and work shadowing. University links, summer schools and national competitions provide challenge to the most able students.

The inspectors agreed with the school's assessment that the quality of teaching and learning is good overall, and that some is outstanding. Teachers plan their lessons with care and attention

to the needs of individual students. In turn, students take a mature and responsible approach to their learning. Students particularly enjoy the creative and practical nature of much of their learning. Teachers are very good at tracking students' progress and giving them targeted support where it is needed. Students' work is well assessed: they are clear about their current academic targets and what they need to do to improve further. Senior staff have an accurate view of the quality of lessons because the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning across the school is very thorough. It has brought about increased consistency of lesson planning whilst allowing individual teachers a good measure of room to exercise their own initiative. Monitoring is linked to well-targeted professional development to continue to improve classroom practice.

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for its students. The interest of the individual student is at the centre of the school's priorities. The inclusion team works with a wide range of agencies to support the health and welfare of vulnerable students and transition arrangements are well developed. Child protection policies are in place: safeguarding procedures are rigorous and meet government requirements. Parents overwhelmingly agree that students are well cared for in school.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The driving force behind the success of the school is the headteacher, ably supported by a strong senior team. All members of the school community share a sense of pride in the school and its achievements. Consequently, they are highly committed and work hard in its interest. The school's leadership and management team knows the school very well. The school's self-evaluation is self-critical, effective and accurate in promoting quality assurance. Leaders and managers have high expectations and show little complacency when targets are reached or exceeded. Excellent capacity to improve has been demonstrated by the very effective way the school has dealt with issues of concern from the last inspection. Middle leadership is a developing strength of the school, helped by the use of good quality coaching support from industry. The governing body gives excellent support to the school and holds the headteacher to account. Resources are used effectively to raise and maintain standards. This includes the funding of more support staff, development of data management systems, broadening curriculum provision and on-going improvements to the accommodation and ICT facilities. The school provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding sixth form. Leadership and provision is excellent and teaching is good. A wide range of GCE AS and A level courses are offered and students benefit greatly from the many and varied enrichment activities. Overall, standards in the sixth form are outstanding; however, performance at AS level in 2007 was less strong. In analysing this underachievement, the school identified that some students were not being sufficiently developed as independent learners at Key Stage 4. In response to this, transition activities to support independent learning have been introduced and students given extra mentoring and tutor support. As a result, Year 12 students are now making good progress towards meeting their challenging targets. Careers advice and guidance is excellent, resulting in a consistent record of all of the Blue Coat's sixth form students securing higher education, employment or training after leaving school. Pastoral support is very strong, helping to prepare students well for adult life. Sixth form students make an outstanding contribution to the whole school. They play an active role in decision-making on issues affecting the school and are excellent role models for younger students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve progress at Key Stage 3.
- Improve progress in Year 12.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

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

I would like to thank you for welcoming me and my colleagues to your school. I appreciate the time many of you gave to tell us about your work and other activities. I am pleased to be able to report that your school provides you with an outstanding education.

These were the things that I found out during my visit.

- The Blue Coat Church of England School is extremely well led by Mrs Hollis, the senior team and governors.
- Your teachers show great commitment to your success. They plan their lessons well and give you excellent support and guidance.
- The standards you achieve across the school are outstanding and the progress you make is good overall. The school has recognised that the progress you made last year at Key Stage 3 and in Year 12 was not as good as expected. In response to this the school is providing extra support for those of you not currently meeting your targets, and is developing your independent learning skills.
- You are mature, polite and courteous. Your behaviour around the school and in classrooms is exemplary. You told us that you enjoy coming to school and feel safe and secure.
- The care, guidance and support you receive are outstanding and contribute significantly to your progress and well-being.
- The school provides an excellent range of curriculum options and extra-curricular activities to meet your different needs and interests, including vocational courses, work experience, enterprise and business education, team-building activities, national competitions, sports and arts.

I am recommending that the school works to sustain the good progress you are now showing in Key Stage 3 and in Year 12.

I wish you all the best for the future.