



**ISI** Independent  
Schools  
Inspectorate

**EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION**

**THE BLUE COAT SCHOOL**

**MAY 2017**



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## SCHOOL'S DETAILS

<b>School</b>	The Blue Coat School			
<b>DfE number</b>	330/6070			
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1152244			
<b>Address</b>	Somerset Road Edgbaston Birmingham West Midlands B17 0HR			
<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 410 6800			
<b>Email address</b>	headssec@thebluecoatschool.com			
<b>Headmaster</b>	Mr Noel Neeson			
<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr Bernard Singleton			
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 11			
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	584			
	<b>Boys</b>	301	<b>Girls</b>	283
	<b>EYFS</b>	160	<b>Pre prep</b>	280
	<b>Prep</b>	304		
<b>Inspection dates</b>	04 to 05 May 2017			

## 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.

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 following their inspection 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.

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.

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 an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting 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.

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 the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

All inspections of independent schools in England are conducted according to the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations. 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'.**

## INSPECTION EVIDENCE

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 chairman of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

### Inspectors

Mrs Serena Alexander	Reporting inspector
Mrs Angela Alsop	Team inspector (Deputy head, IAPS school)
Mr Adrian Downie	Team inspector (Director of studies, IAPS school)
Miss Heather Fulton	Team inspector (Head of pre-prep, IAPS school)
Mr Brian Melia	Team inspector (Former head, IAPS school)

## 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### About the school

- 1.1 The Blue Coat School is an independent day school for boys and girls aged between 2 and 11. 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.
- 1.2 The school is organised in two sections: the pre-prep department provides for pupils aged two to seven and the prep department for those aged seven to eleven years. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) caters for pupils aged two to five and is an integral part of the school's pre-prep department. Since the previous inspection the school has completed new Nursery, classroom and sports facilities, and the management structure has been reorganised. A new headmaster was appointed in September 2016.

### What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to provide outstanding educational opportunities for every child to thrive, developing confidence, ability and intellect within a caring Christian environment. It seeks to offer a broad, balanced and forward-looking curriculum with effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) in well-resourced facilities for enjoyable and imaginative learning, fostered by enthusiastic, dedicated and well-qualified staff, ensuring a secure and positive community in which pupils learn to 'grow in grace'.

### About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from professional families mostly living within a relatively small geographical area around the school, over half are from minority ethnic backgrounds and a number of faiths are represented. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability profile of the school is above average. The school has identified 42 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) which include dyslexia, cognition and learning needs, all of whom receive additional specialist help. Also, 1 pupil in the school has an education, health and care plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 36 pupils whose needs are mainly supported by their classroom teachers, and 1 of whom receives additional help. Data used by the school have identified 111 pupils as the more able in the school's population, who receive additional challenges as appropriate. Pupils identified as talented in sport and music are encouraged to attend additional activities of benefit to them.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
Buttons	Nursery (Age from 2 to 3 years)
Transition	Nursery (Age from 3 to 4 years)

## **2. KEY FINDINGS**

2.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- From their earliest days in the EYFS, pupils of all ages and abilities make excellent progress overall.
- Pupils achieve highly in a broad range of competitions and in extra-curricular activities.
- From the EYFS onwards, pupils' attitudes to learning are outstanding.
- Pupils in Years 5 and 6 develop initiative and independence through the imaginative enrichment tasks that they are set.
- The excellent achievement of pupils at all ages is supported by committed governance, effective leadership and generous investment in resources and staff.

2.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils' excellent personal development is nurtured by the high standard of pastoral care that they receive from their form tutors and house staff.
- Pupils demonstrate a genuine respect for their own and other cultures.
- Pupils have many opportunities to make decisions and understand that these help to determine their own success.
- Pupils' strong social development is promoted through their active participation in a variety of team sports.

### **Recommendations**

2.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider the following:

- Improve pupils' ability to demonstrate initiative and independence by extending the setting of enrichment tasks to younger pupils.
- Implement the school's comprehensive development plan and evaluate the improvement of the outcomes for pupils.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 From their earliest days in the EYFS, pupils of all ages and abilities make excellent progress overall. They lay firm foundations in the Nursery and make rapid progress as they progress into Reception. By the end of Reception, almost all children have met all the early learning goals and many have exceeded them. The school does not take part in National Curriculum tests, but the available evidence demonstrates attainment to be well above national age-related expectations. At the age of 11, pupils are extremely successful in their entry examinations to selective independent and maintained senior schools, with many winning scholarships. Pupils of all ages are supported by well-qualified and committed staff, excellent resources, and a broad curriculum which includes modern foreign languages from Year 3 and many opportunities for sport, music and other creative activities, fully meeting the schools aims. The excellent achievement of pupils is assisted by committed governance, effective leadership and generous investment in resources and staff.
- 3.3 Pupils' overall performance is carefully monitored through a carefully planned programme of standardised testing. Results for both individual pupils and for each year group are analysed and used to inform teachers' planning so that each pupil is set appropriate targets to enhance their progress. Pupils with SEND or EAL make very positive progress that is carefully tracked. They are well supported by appropriate tasks set to them in lessons as well as by individual and group support by specialist teachers. More able and talented pupils make particularly rapid progress as they benefit from a variety of challenges both in and out of the classroom. The excellent progress of pupils is supported by the leadership's rigorous monitoring of planning, marking, assessment, and the standard of teaching and learning across the whole school including the EYFS, thus meeting the previous inspection recommendations. Pupils' successful outcomes are maintained by careful analysis that informs the comprehensive school development plan, identifying adjustments to curriculum and affording consideration to additional resources. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, a few pupils felt that marking does not help them improve and that they do not know how well they are doing. Inspection evidence gained from observation, interview and scrutiny of books demonstrates that marking is almost always meticulous and thorough, with many helpful comments made to help pupils to improve. Pupils expressed their appreciation of their teachers and the help they receive if they have any concerns with their work. The overwhelming majority of pupils' questionnaire responses agreed that the school provides them with the opportunity to learn and make good progress.
- 3.4 From the EYFS onwards, pupils' attitudes to learning are outstanding. They benefit from the fine learning habits modelled by their teaching staff. Pupils enjoy the many opportunities on offer, work well independently and display considerable initiative. Children in the EYFS are confident and keen to do well. They have high focus on learning. Older pupils' self-organisation skills are high. They enjoy showing their own research to their teachers. Pupils successfully work collaboratively on projects both in the classroom and through using internet resources when at home. Strong mutual encouragement was observed from pupils during paired work in music. In interview, pupils explained the benefits of using two brains to solve problems.



- 3.5 The development of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning is excellent. Their scientific skills are well developed both in the core curriculum and in cross-curricular project work in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Pupils successfully launched a helium balloon into near space and then accomplished its retrieval, to their great satisfaction. Children in the EYFS benefit from topics such as the study of minibeasts that capture their interest and extend their skills across all areas of the curriculum, including creative writing and numeracy. Pupils' creative and aesthetic skills are highly developed through the study of art and artists, the use of a wide range of resources and imaginatively set projects. Displays of pupils' work throughout the school are of an exceptionally high standard.
- 3.6 Pupils are eloquent and confident communicators who listen respectfully to each other, competently evaluate what they hear, express themselves clearly and share views thoughtfully. Children in the EYFS develop excellent phonetic skills that help them make strong progress in their reading and spelling. By the end of Reception, most can write simple sentences and read books of an appropriate level independently. Pupils' reading ability is carefully monitored and is of a high standard. They benefit from amply stocked and very well run libraries, and are carefully guided to texts that reinforce their academic studies as well as stimulating their imagination. Older pupils' creative writing is of a particularly high standard. They demonstrate accurate paragraph use and punctuation, make imaginative use of ideas and know that using descriptive language makes written work interesting. Pupils learn to speak with confidence through the many opportunities to perform in drama and to read in house and school assemblies, as well as in Chapel and in celebrations such as the Christmas carol service. They apply these skills across the curriculum to great effect, as observed in a mature discussion of the symbolism of baptism in religious education (RE).
- 3.7 Pupils have highly developed numerical skills. In Nursery they learn to count forward and backwards using games and songs, and by Reception they can count up to 20 and beyond and are performing calculations independently. By the end of Year 6, pupils are highly competent in calculations, confidently manipulate algebraic expressions, form equations to show the results of an investigation and have a comprehensive understanding of geometry. They are supported by the high expectations of their teachers and a wide range of appropriate resources, as well as by many opportunities to investigate numbers for themselves such as in a study of the lines in a mystic rose. Pupils apply their skills across the curriculum; they use graphs and tables in geography, history and science, calculate density in science, apply their knowledge of geometry in their designs in art, and use spreadsheets in ICT.
- 3.8 Pupils of all ages are confident and competent in their use of ICT, benefitting from significant investment by governors which provides a wide range of technical resources and also support from specialist staff. In the EYFS, children choose from a variety of applications and games on tablets and computers to reinforce their literacy and numeracy skills, and use devices such as cameras and programmable toys. Older pupils develop their skills in their ICT lessons and they spoke enthusiastically about how they apply these to all areas of learning. They confidently word process their written work for displays. They use graphical and coding skills to create interactive games and animations; Year 2 pupils created an animation of a flower growing and those in Year 5 designed and animated race cars around a track. They work with spreadsheets and use a variety of devices to carry out research for their projects. Such opportunities are embedded in a range of well-planned lessons across the curriculum.

- 3.9 Pupils achieve highly in a broad range of competitions and in extra-curricular activities. The standard of music is very high and a large proportion of pupils take individual instrument lessons, passing their grades most successfully. They sing in the school's choirs and perform in a range of school ensembles, with several pupils participating in local and national choirs and orchestras. Pupils are also most successful in national linguistic, mathematics and scientific challenges as well as in chess. Pupils' physical skills are very well developed both in the curriculum and in the extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities available to them. Their successes in both individual and team sports are numerous, particularly in swimming, gymnastics, football and netball. Pupils benefit from the considerable investment in sporting facilities and specialist staff. Resources are outstanding and constantly improved after careful analysis by governance and leadership of what is needed to promote the best outcomes for pupils.
- 3.10 Pupils have highly developed self-study skills; they are confident in drawing on a wide range of sources both in the curriculum and in tasks set for extension. They develop strong higher-order skills which they apply both in debate and in written work; pupils in Year 2 confidently analysed their decisions in personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and understood that with more information their ideas can change. Year 6 pupils drew on their knowledge of both science and religion to discuss the origins of the universe. Pupils work well independently and enjoy the challenges on offer. Pupils in the prep have their curiosity, critical thinking and problem solving skills extended in the weekly 'Thinking, Exploring and Doing' (TED) programme. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 develop initiative and independence through the enrichment tasks they are set for homework such as writing about the steps they will need to take to achieve their ambitions, designing a sporting warm-up and creating a self-portrait. This imaginative programme is talked of by pupils as one of the factors behind their success.

#### **4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Throughout their time at school, pupils grow in self-confidence as they successfully meet academic and other challenges. From the EYFS onwards, they are encouraged to self-reflect and thus develop their self-knowledge. They understand their strengths and weaknesses. Pupils are encouraged to focus on using the skills that they have learnt and to persevere, preparing them very well for the next steps in their education. Pupils develop resilience in their academic, sporting and extra-curricular endeavours. Their self-confidence is promoted by the very positive atmosphere of mutual respect between pupils and the adults in the school, including both academic and support staff. From Year 3 onwards, pupils benefit from the additional pastoral support they receive from their house staff. They can start and end each school day in their allocated house, two for boys and two for girls. Pupils spoke warmly of the care they receive, particularly for those who choose to stay after school. They appreciate having a place to relax and 'chill' with their friends. Pupils' excellent personal development is nurtured by the high standard of pastoral care that they receive from their form tutors and their house staff.
- 4.3 Pupils have many opportunities to make decisions, and understand that these help to determine their own success. They embrace a positive philosophy and recognise that putting effort into their work helps them to improve, just as they must practise with their music to become adept. Pupils appreciate the motivational messages on display. They understand the importance of making decisions over friendships. In interview, pupils quoted the school's core values: 'be truthful, patient and kind, courageously persevere and show respect to others'. They also explained how they apply these values when any difficulties arise with their friends. In the curriculum, EYFS children make decisions about their activities and older pupils can choose which level of challenge they wish to attempt. The TED programme offers additional opportunities and pupils can choose from such activities as STEM projects, debating and extra sporting options. Year 5 and 6 pupils also make their own choices from the various enrichment tasks; on the task itself, how they present it and the time and effort they put into it, setting themselves high standards. They proudly shared some of their completed projects and spoke with enthusiasm about their achievements.
- 4.4 Pupils demonstrate a genuine respect for their own and other cultures. This was confirmed by all pupils and almost all parents in their questionnaire responses. Pupils are very aware of others' backgrounds and understand their similarities as well as the different beliefs of their peers. A range of cultural festivals and traditions such as Chinese New Year, Diwali and Ramadan are discussed in assemblies and in the RE curriculum. Pupils bring in artefacts from home to share their experiences with others, such as the beautiful sound from a Chinese flute. Pupils' cultural awareness is raised by visits to places including the local synagogue and cross-curriculum days such as Aztec day. They study other cultures in geography. For example, Year 4 pupils have been learning about India; they have conducted their own independent research to discover any family links and shared their results with the class. Through their charitable fundraising, pupils appreciate the challenges for those living in Africa and they were visibly moved by an assembly on the work of a hospital ship.

- 4.5 Pupils have a deep spiritual understanding. They appreciate the importance of the religious aspects of life, both their own and those of others, and have respect for the Christian ethos that permeates throughout the school. Younger pupils appreciate their natural surroundings in the outside environment. Older pupils benefit from the opportunities for calm and spiritual reflection in their assemblies and other celebrations, particularly those in Chapel. Pupils talk about how the messages they receive help them have a deeper understanding about themselves. The curriculum also has spiritual opportunities, such as thinking about the special features of one's name in PSHE. Cross-curricular projects develop awareness further such as the Year 6 study of religious art followed by pupils' own projects, including a sculpture of the 'whole world in his hands'.
- 4.6 Pupils have a strong moral understanding. They behave extremely well, willingly accepting responsibility for their own behaviour. Pupils recognise that others may very occasionally misbehave but are tolerant and forgiving of their misdemeanours, following the deeply embedded school values. In their questionnaire responses, the vast majority of pupils and parents agreed that the school actively promotes good behaviour although a very small minority of pupils disagreed that teachers are fair. In interview, pupils enjoyed a robust discussion on the rights and wrongs of everyday situations in school, and all agreed that rules and sanctions are fair and that teachers usually allocate these justly. They are appreciative of the new rewards that have recently been introduced and enjoy collecting these from leadership. Pupils have an understanding of the clear moral rules of various religions, and in RE they wrote their own ten commandments in the form of positive decisions. In PSHE, pre-prep pupils discussed the rights and wrongs of various situations and learned to make sensible decisions. Older pupils discussed the importance of good manners and learned about parliament and the democratic process.
- 4.7 Pupils are highly socially aware. Lessons are regularly planned to include collaborative and group work, and pupils work extremely effectively with others to solve problems in class. For example, Year 3 science pupils worked very well in groups, displaying patience and understanding when setting up their seed experiment. In PSHE, pupils explore social issues such as what makes a good friend. Year 4 music pupils composed their own rap on how to combat bullying. Pupils also work well together with pupils from different year groups in their houses and when tackling problems in interactive event days which have included history, construction, music and solving puzzles. From Year 4, pupils go on an annual residential or camping trip. This serves to develop their independence as well as promoting their social awareness and building resilience as they meet new challenges together, such as shopping in a French market. Pupils' strong social development is promoted through their active participation in a variety of team sports, as well as in competitions where they represent their various houses. Pupils of different ages also relax and work together in their houses. They make decisions together such as deciding which games to buy for their house from a budget.
- 4.8 Those pupils in positions of responsibility are proud of the trust placed in them and fulfil their roles most responsibly. All Year 6 pupils have a responsibility that contributes positively to others. These include head boy and girl, house and sports captains and their deputies, as well as positions that reflect their interests and skills such as library or chapel monitors. Other class- and school-based positions are available for younger children. Pre-prep pupils have roles such as line leader and register monitor. The elected pupil school council represents the views of the pupil body and negotiates changes with the leadership team. They proudly talk about their involvement in the creation of the new friendship stop in pre-prep and the changes to the school's dining arrangements. Pupils are keen to fundraise and organise their own events to support those less fortunate than themselves through national charities and those overseas, particularly those in Africa. Chapel monitors are proud of their help in the local distribution

centre as they check the contents of the shoe boxes for children overseas in the annual Christmas appeal. Pupils benefit from strong links with Birmingham Cathedral which support some of the musical activities in the school.

- 4.9 Pupils of all ages have an appreciation of how to keep safe and healthy. Children in the Nursery know that they should wash their hands before eating their snack of fresh fruit. Pre-prep pupils gained a better understanding of nutrition and healthy eating through a discussion of some new fruit and vegetables options with the caterers. Pupils of all ages make sensible choices from the lunch menu. Those with special diets collect different coloured trays to help supervisors identify them and check the suitability of their selection. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe online; they have received appropriate training and safety information is prominently on display. Those in Year 6 are aware of how to think and act safely as they become more independent after a visit to a local experiential learning centre. Pupils appreciate the need for exercise and enjoy the many opportunities in the curriculum, at playtime and in the extra-curricular activities. In their questionnaire responses, the overwhelming majority of pupils confirmed that the school keeps them safe and healthy.