

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## INSPECTION REPORT ON

### The Blue Coat School

Full Name of the School	<b>The Blue Coat School</b>
DfES Number	<b>330/6070</b>
Address	<b>Somerset Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B17 0HR.</b>
Telephone Number	<b>0121 410 6800</b>
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Email Address	<b>admissions@bluecoat.bham.sch.uk</b>
Head Teacher	<b>Mr A D J Browning</b>
Proprietor	<b>Professor J N Hay</b>
Age Range	<b>2 - 11 years</b>
Gender	<b>Mixed</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>29<sup>th</sup> January to 1<sup>st</sup> February 2007</b>

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 The Blue Coat School, Birmingham, was founded in 1722 and opened as a co-educational charity school 'for the purpose of maintaining poor children' in the centre of Birmingham, and moved to its present site, on the boundary of the Edgbaston and Harborne districts of the city, in 1930. Following a brief period in the 1950s when the school was a voluntary aided primary school, it became a fully independent preparatory school in 1966. In the late 1980s and 1990s, a considerable building programme was undertaken adding many specialist teaching facilities, including a sports centre. Since the last inspection, further major changes have taken

place. The school no longer caters for boarding pupils or for pupils in Years 7 and 8.

- 1.2 At the time of the inspection there were 547 pupils on roll, aged between 2 and 11 years. Of these 308 were boys and 239 were girls. A total of 60 pupils attended on a part-time basis. Of the 547, 170 children were in the Foundation Stage (ages 2-5) and 119 in Years 1 and 2. In the preparatory department there were 258 pupils in Years 3-6 (ages 7-11).
- 1.3 The school has identified 8 pupils as in need of additional help, usually in mathematics or literacy. No pupils have a statement of special educational need. Approximately 40 per cent of pupils do not have English as their principal language: although many are fluent in English, a few receive some support.
- 1.4 Pupils come from a fairly small geographical area, from families that strongly support their children's education and want them to be successful. The majority of pupils have parents who work in professional occupations.
- 1.5 Entry to the school at the age of two is not on a competitive basis. However, the school does follow a detailed and fair admissions procedure. Pupils seeking admission to the pre-preparatory section have an initial interview and informal assessments. Pupils transferring to the preparatory section, or from other schools at the age of seven, take a series of assessment tests, to assess their suitability for the school. The pupils cover a wide spectrum of ability, though their average ability is above the national average. If pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their results will be above the average for all maintained primary schools. Most pupils are successful in transferring to senior independent schools or to maintained grammar schools in the West Midlands. Several pupils enter senior independent schools having gained scholarships.
- 1.6 The school aims are summarised in its vision statement whereby it seeks to provide an excellent, rounded education for every child, developing confidence, ability and intellect within a caring Christian environment. It hopes to prepare its pupils to engage effectively with the dynamic world unfolding around them, equipping them with the skills and confidence to grasp their opportunities, and the knowledge and sensitivity to recognise their responsibilities.
- 1.7 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

## **2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

### **The Educational Experience Provided**

- 2.1 The educational experience provided for pupils is of significantly high quality. It is broad and balanced and successfully reflects the aims and philosophy of the school. Since the last inspection, curriculum planning has been further developed in both the pre-preparatory and preparatory departments and the school is working towards ensuring continuity of planning between these two areas, having recognised that it is not apparent in all subjects.
- 2.2 Right across the school, emphasis is placed on providing pupils with activities to contribute, as rapidly as is appropriate, to their linguistic,

mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative development. They are easily able to acquire the skills of speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy in a well-planned and progressive way.

- 2.3 'Buttons', which provides for those under three, allows children to experience a wide range of activities based on the nationally produced 'Birth to Three Matters' guidelines. In the rest of the Foundation Stage, appropriate emphasis is placed on helping pupils to achieve the Early Learning Goals and to progress beyond them. The curriculum for Years 1 and 2 follows the broad outline of the National Curriculum, together with religious education and personal, social and health education (PSHE). The reintroduction of French in Years 1 and 2 is planned for the new academic year. In Years 3 to 6, the National Curriculum is enriched by increased music, art and games. The school's curriculum also includes a variety of modern foreign languages, a situation the school is rightly reviewing for the future. Although the curriculum is broad and balanced, there are insufficient opportunities provided for pupils to explore the possibility of using information and communication technology (ICT) in certain subject areas. Again the school has plans to address this, and to review the overall time allocated to individual subjects.
- 2.4 Pupils' educational experiences in all areas of the school contribute effectively to their progress in learning. In lessons and discussions, pupils are encouraged to offer their views and demonstrate their understanding although opportunities for this are not taken up in some subject areas. PSHE has been developed to strengthen pupils' personal development. This is strongly supported by class teachers, form tutors and the thriving house system.
- 2.5 An excellent range of extra-curricular activities, appropriate for both boys and girls, is offered at lunchtime and after school. This provision strongly supports the curriculum and also provides for individual interests. The curriculum is also enhanced by a variety of educational trips, visits to the school and sports fixtures against other schools. For example, Year 6 pupils benefit from a residential team-building and leadership course, which is part of a wider programme of events for leavers. Many opportunities exist for pupils to be involved in the vibrant musical life of the school, and confidence and self-esteem are developed through regular drama productions.
- 2.6 Much work has gone into smoothing the transition between various stages of the school and new pupils are supported by an effective 'buddy' system. Preparation for secondary education is very successful in terms of both results and in the provision for pupils' personal development.
- 2.7 Curriculum planning is of high quality generally and particularly effective in the early years. The school is working to strengthen continuity of planning between the pre-preparatory and preparatory departments, something which is clearly evident in mathematics, but which is not apparent in all subject areas. All pupils across the school experience the full curriculum and apply themselves to learning, so making considerable progress. The spacious rooms also contribute to the educational experience. For example, a reception class was able to practise Kodaly, a tempo and movement activity, within its classroom.
- 2.8 The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. Identification of the needs of these pupils is undertaken with

care and detailed records are kept. Specialist support, either within the classroom or in individual or group sessions, is efficiently organised, and tracking allows pupils' progress to be monitored. Action plans and, if appropriate, individual educational plans are drawn up, and staff are well-informed about the practical implications of these in order to ensure that pupils receive an education most closely suited to their needs.

- 2.9 An appropriate policy for gifted and talented pupils is in place and the school is successfully developing specific provision for these pupils. A new learning support resources booklet provides a very useful reference point for all staff.
- 2.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

### **Pupils' Learning and Achievements**

- 2.11 Pupils achieve exceptionally well in both their academic and broader education. Consequently, one of the basic principles of the school, that of encouraging each pupil to achieve as high an academic standard as possible, is realised. In the subjects that they study, as well as in the other activities they pursue, pupils are well grounded in knowledge, skills and understanding related to the individual subject or activity. Since the last inspection, pupils' significant achievements in most areas of the curriculum have been maintained, and in certain areas, notably English, mathematics, science and music, built upon and improved.
- 2.12 In the Foundation Stage the well-planned programme of activities and teachers' close adherence to it ensure that even the youngest children learn the basic skills most successfully. In 'Buttons', the nursery, reception and other pre-preparatory department classes, pupils learn to read and write with confidence. Firm foundations are also laid for pupils' mathematical development, and as a result they show a growing facility with numbers. Pupils' knowledge and understanding are developing successfully, through appropriately planned lessons and effective teaching. Whilst pupils' ICT skills are developing at an adequate rate, insufficient opportunity is provided for them to use these skills in other areas of the curriculum. Encouraged by their teachers, pupils use their imagination and creativity and apply these to other activities.
- 2.13 In Years 3 to 6, pupils build successfully upon the very good start they have made in their early years in school. They apply their rapidly expanding skills and knowledge to different subjects and a variety of situations. This is particularly apparent in their written work.
- 2.14 By the time they leave the school, most pupils have speaking and listening skills that are well developed for their ages: they are articulate and confident in their ability to converse easily with their peers and with adults. Pupils' rapidly developing listening skills are further enhanced by much of the work they do in subjects such as history and geography. Pupils demonstrate high levels of creativity, particularly through the writing and investigative work, in subjects such as science, as well as in their writing generally. Pupils' creative skills are also well developed in music, where many achieve high standards right across the school.
- 2.15 Pupils use their mathematical skills competently, particularly in the subjects to which they are most easily applied, such as science, geography and design and technology. Pupils demonstrate similar confidence in their

use of ICT in those subjects in which they have the opportunity. Pupils achieve satisfactory levels of competence in ICT, although their ability to apply those skills to other subjects is hampered in some cases by a lack of opportunity.

- 2.16 Pupils for whom English is not their first language achieve at a level that is commensurate with their abilities given their language competence. Similarly, pupils with learning difficulties also achieve well in relation to their overall ability levels. There are no marked differences in the attainment of boys and girls.
- 2.17 Across the school, high achievement is evident in many subjects, particularly so in English, mathematics, science and music. In many lessons high quality work is found and pupils' progress is considerable. Direct comparisons between pupils' standards and those of pupils in other schools nationally are not possible at the age of 7, as tests taken in 2006 at that age were not externally moderated. However, comparisons at age 11 are possible and these show that pupils' results over the last three years have been far above average in mathematics and above average in English and science, although in 2006 English results had risen and were also far above average. Further indicators in the form of the significant number of pupils who secured entrance in 2006 to local grammar schools, show that pupils attain high standards in many subjects by the time they leave the school.
- 2.18 The school has a considerable list of both individual and team achievements in a variety of areas. In sport, several gymnasts won gold medals at the Trinity Gymnastics Championships; at the National Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools' Championships, and at several other events. Many successes were achieved at local swimming clubs, and pupils were selected to join the Warwickshire County Elite Performance Teams Squads. Pupils were also selected for the West Midlands under 13 Hockey Squad, competing a year above their age-group.
- 2.19 Awards in chess (the school team are the Birmingham Primary School Chess Champions) and high quality performances in drama are further indicators of the breadth of achievement. Results in music are also of great significance particularly in Associated Board examinations. Individual pupils have performed in the National Children's Orchestra, and the chapel choir has a significant local reputation. The school is particularly proud of the 13 gold certificates awarded to its pupils in the 2006 Primary Mathematics Challenge, and of the regional and national finalists in the Eurotalk Junior Language Challenge. At the same time, care is taken to ensure that less skilled pupils have equal access to coaching and tuition and therefore have the opportunity to compete at a level appropriate to their ability.
- 2.20 Pupils' attitudes to work and study are good in all sections of the school. They respond very positively to the high expectations of their teachers. They are friendly, happy and eager to talk positively about what they are doing and how they are getting on.
- 2.21 Throughout the school, pupils read and write intelligently and fluently at a level that is well in excess of that appropriate for their age. They are confident learners and listen carefully to the ideas of other pupils, as well as to their teachers. Pupils work and study effectively, both on their own and cooperatively with others. For example, in a Year 6 music lesson,

pupils split into groups and worked away from their teacher, remaining on task and producing excellent results. In addition, when pupils are given opportunities to reason and think through arguments and points of view, they respond well at a level appropriate to their age. In a Year 1 science lesson, for example, pupils were thinking logically about an investigation, making and justifying predictions about the possible outcomes.

- 2.22 When pupils arrive at their lessons they settle down quickly and actively apply themselves to the tasks set. In a reception class mathematics lesson, after a very enjoyable introductory team game, children quickly moved to small group work and were immediately engaged in their work. Throughout the school, pupils concentrate well and show enthusiasm for their work and activities. They clearly enjoy the learning experiences they are offered, organising and presenting their studies well.

### **Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils**

- 2.23 The personal development of the pupils is outstanding. At the last inspection it was stated that the school provided an excellent range of opportunities for each child's personal development. These standards have been maintained and built upon. Pupils demonstrate a very well-developed spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness that is evident in many aspects of their life at school.
- 2.24 The ethos, philosophy and Christian foundation of the school place pupils' spiritual development at the heart of their school experience, from 'Buttons' and the nursery to Year 6. Throughout, pupils have the opportunity to develop a strong spiritual awareness notably through the varied chapel services and assemblies. During the Wednesday chapel for example, preparatory department pupils were told the story of 'Esther' in a creative and enjoyable way by a visiting preacher from the Birmingham City Mission. This enabled them to have a much better understanding of the story and its implications for them.
- 2.25 As a result of the high quality provision put in place by the school, pupils develop a strong moral sense. Children as young as those in 'Buttons' and the nursery respect the school rules and are able to distinguish right from wrong. Pupils of all ages are able to explain why school rules are necessary. They understand the system of rewards and sanctions and feel that these are largely dealt with fairly and consistently. Pupils are courteous to each other, to their teachers and to visitors. Staff show similar courtesy and respect to their pupils. Merits and other certificates and awards are given for good work and positive behaviour. A recent award for help with recycling has been introduced and enjoyed by the pupils. Sanctions are also in place for poor work or behaviour and those pupils interviewed had a clear understanding of the need for this system. Behaviour around the school is excellent, both within and outside the classroom.
- 2.26 Pupils' social development, and their ability to contribute to the school community in a positive way, are excellent. A system of prefects and monitors for all Year 6 pupils proves greatly beneficial for these pupils and the school, and they are proud to be given such responsible positions. Pupils in Year 2 are also given roles of responsibility, such as 'stairs monitor', which they relish and take very seriously. The house system also encourages a sense of loyalty and pride amongst the pupils as well as a sense of belonging to a community.

- 2.27 Fund raising for charity is also carried out by the pupils and this is often based around child-centred causes, such as 'Operation Christmas Child' and 'Children in the Sudan'. These help to provide pupils with an awareness of those less fortunate than themselves. Valuable social experiences are also provided by numerous outside visits offered to all age groups. A residential trip for Year 6 is planned for later this year. All pupils also have access to a comprehensive PSHE programme in which citizenship is included. All such activities ensure that pupils develop their social awareness significantly.
- 2.28 Pupils have many good opportunities, to which they respond in a most positive way, to learn about and appreciate cultural traditions from their own and other backgrounds. For example, displays showing festivals from the major religions are evident in the pre-preparatory department corridors. In religious education, Year 6 pupils are given the opportunity to study world religions such as Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. Similarly in ICT, Year 6 pupils have been researching facts about different countries of their own choice. In a chapel concert, the Latin Percussion Group played with great enthusiasm, and in Year 4 dance they were successfully exploring an Hawaiian theme. Pupils' appreciation of the arts is enhanced by visits to local galleries, and pupils are given the opportunity to participate in regular musical concerts and productions.
- 2.29 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

#### **The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)**

- 2.30 Teaching overall is effective and in some cases outstanding. Consequently it promotes high achievement amongst pupils, which is one of the aims of the school. The generally good quality of teaching, found at the time of the previous inspection, has been maintained.
- 2.31 Teachers expect a lot from their pupils and encourage them to become interested in their work. They create learning opportunities where pupils considerably increase their knowledge and understanding of a particular skill.
- 2.32 In the best practice teachers encourage their pupils to learn and think for themselves by the clever use of questions that are set at levels appropriate to the pupils' ages and abilities. The teachers' own considerable subject knowledge enables them not only to set work that challenges their pupils, but also to provide illuminating answers to pupils' questions. Their evident enthusiasm is highly motivating to the pupils.
- 2.33 Right across the school, teachers manage their pupils' behaviour very well, yet still enable them to express themselves in a variety of ways. Lessons are well planned, so that pupils clearly understand what they are expected to do and what they are required to learn. Almost all lessons move at a brisk pace and effective use is made of the time available. All such factors encourage pupils to behave responsibly.
- 2.34 During many of the most successful lessons, teachers involve pupils in a range of activities, which include investigations, discussion and practical and theoretical work. They make highly effective use of resources and time. In subjects like mathematics, physical education and music they enhance their pupils' learning by encouraging them to work in pairs and in small groups. Indeed, the sharing of apparatus and working together is

successfully encouraged even amongst the youngest children, in 'Buttons' and in the nursery classes. In one outstanding Year 5 mathematics lesson, following a brief but highly relevant summary of a previous lesson, pupils were required to work, in a practical way, in pairs or as individuals, to explore the area of a variety of two-dimensional shapes. The teacher's pertinent questioning produced a good pace to the lesson, and the excellent use of resources ensured that all pupils made rapid progress.

- 2.35 On the occasions when teaching does not reach such high standards, and in particular in the very few that were unsatisfactory, it is usually as the result of a lack of variety in the teaching methods being used, overlong introductions which fail to stimulate the pupils, and insufficiently challenging work which is not matched to pupils' different abilities. Consequently, insufficient learning takes place and pupils become uninterested.
- 2.36 Mutual respect is the basis for the strong relationships found between teachers and pupils throughout the school. As a result, pupils feel confident and able to express their views, ideas and opinions, and so respond in a positive and productive manner. Teachers know their pupils well and provide sensitive help, particularly for those pupils with difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils' needs are well recognised and addressed in an appropriate way.
- 2.37 Teachers make good use of the school's stock of high quality resources. Such resources are carefully selected to enhance pupils' learning and understanding of what is being taught. The lack of sufficient ICT accommodation means that insufficient use is made of ICT to support pupils' learning in several subjects. The school is aware of this and has plans in hand to address the issue. The libraries are well stocked and many other teaching rooms, as well as specialist rooms, have appropriate stocks of books that are used to support both teaching and learning.
- 2.38 The school has an adequate assessment policy, which outlines a variety of assessment methods. However in practice there are some inconsistencies in its application across the curriculum. Good quality assessments in mathematics, English and science are evident throughout the school. In other subjects the quality is uneven. The outcome of the excellent practice is that assessment is then used effectively to assist teachers in their planning and to set meaningful targets for pupils. It also has the effect of enabling good progress to be made by pupils through the school.
- 2.39 In the areas of the curriculum where assessment is more variable, whilst pupils' progress is monitored regularly through a range of tests and examinations, such assessments are not always used to inform teachers' planning or to set targets for pupils. As a result, whilst assessment is relatively well used to inform parents about pupils' attainment and effort, it is not used effectively throughout the curriculum to inform parents about what their child needs to do to continue to improve. The outcomes of national tests are however used well as a benchmark for the school's own results, and diagnostically to address any major shortcomings.
- 2.40 A whole school marking policy is in place. However marking is inconsistently applied across the curriculum and although the best includes comments designed to help pupils to understand what it is they need to do to improve, in some cases marking simply states what a pupil has learned and can do, often in an inappropriate style of language that the pupil does not understand, or will benefit from.



- 2.41 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

### **3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS**

#### **The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils**

- 3.1 The quality of pastoral care is outstanding and the school is punctilious in ensuring the welfare, health and safety of its pupils. This is an improvement since the last inspection when pastoral care was described as effective. Pastoral care is very effective and achieves the aim of the school to provide 'care, encouragement and support on an individual basis.' Staff provide a high quality of care for pupils and the school pays careful attention to their welfare, health and safety.
- 3.2 Staff know their pupils well and provide very good support and guidance. Pupils feel secure and express confidence that staff will help them to overcome any problems that they might encounter. Effective pastoral arrangements are in place. Formal and well-devised procedures operate for pupils' care and staff benefit from a high level of support by senior managers. Pupils' attendance is closely monitored and all registers of admission and attendance are properly maintained.
- 3.3 The quality of relationships between staff and pupils is excellent. The head teacher and staff choose to eat lunch with pupils, and the chaplain has a pupil committee to help determine the allocation of money raised for charitable purpose. Pupils mix harmoniously and show respect for one another.
- 3.4 Pupils understand what constitutes acceptable behaviour and express confidence that staff will deal effectively with bullying, should it occur. High quality counselling is provided to any pupils who express relationship difficulties. A system of stars, merits and commendation certificates is in place to encourage good conduct, and many pupils are awarded these in assembly. The school should consider extending this popular arrangement beyond academic achievement to include good conduct and broader social achievement. This would fit the school's broader aims and meet a wish expressed by some pupils. In the pre-preparatory department a system of stickers and head teacher awards is also in place, and this is also seen as effective in promoting good behaviour.
- 3.5 Staff take every care to safeguard and promote their pupils' welfare, health and safety. Child protection policies are thorough, and both teaching and non-teaching staff have received relevant training in this matter. Pupils are carefully supervised. All fire prevention measures are in order, and fire practices are held regularly and recorded. The school has an extremely large number of staff qualified in the administration of first aid. Risk assessments are completed for school trips and within teaching areas. Pupils expressed the view that the meals that are provided and the amount of physical activity they undertake help to promote their health.
- 3.6 The Blue Coat School is a pleasant, happy and safe environment where pupils are able to develop in accordance with the aims of the school.
- 3.7 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

## **The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community**

- 3.8 The school fulfils its intention to create close relationships with its parents and the local community. The parental questionnaire showed a high degree of parental satisfaction with almost all aspects of the school's work, but particularly with teaching and the curriculum, the range of extra-curricular activities offered and the attitudes and behaviour the school promotes.
- 3.9 Some areas of concern at the time of the last inspection, particularly regarding information about the curriculum, have been dealt with. A termly calendar and weekly newsletter are issued both in electronic and hard copy, keeping parents informed and up-to-date about events. The school's website is expanding and includes information about the curriculum. Informative notice boards are also in place. For example in the nursery an excellent notice board gives detailed information for parents about all aspects of life in the nursery. Comprehensive booklets for parents cover all the necessary information and procedures including the formal complaints procedure. The school handles complaints with due care.
- 3.10 A small percentage of parents feel that they are not given enough information about their children's progress. However, inspection findings show that sufficient information is available. Significant improvements have recently been made to the way pupils' progress is reported to their parents. These now include half-termly grade sheets with brief targets in literacy and numeracy. A detailed written report is issued at the end of each year. This tends to be descriptive and broadly encouraging in the pre-preparatory department, although lacking, on many occasions, suggestions as to what a pupil needs to do next in order to continue to improve. More realistic and diagnostic reports are provided to parents in the preparatory section of the school. Moves to minimise these variations between the different parts of the school in the interests of overall consistency have already begun.
- 3.11 Parents of young children can meet the teachers at the beginning and end of the day. For older pupils, parents have ready access to the house staff and can make appointments, through the school office, to speak to teachers regarding their child's progress or areas of concern. Formal parents' evenings are also held twice a year in the Autumn and Spring terms.
- 3.12 Parents are able to become involved in the life and work of the school in many ways. Parents of new pupils are welcomed through parent teas, while similar events for parents are set up at the transition points within each pupil's school life. The aim is to create a more seamless progression from one part of the school to the next. Parents accompany various school visits, talk to classes about subjects of curricular and cultural interest, support matches, and attend chapel services. The Friends (parents' association) is active in organising social events which are very well supported and which raise funds for the school and for charities.
- 3.13 Good links are in place with the local community, and a particularly strong partnership exists with Chad Vale, a local maintained school. Various local groups make use of the school's swimming pool and other excellent facilities. The local church uses the sports hall for its youth club, and sports fun days are held for pupils at local schools. The choirs visit various external venues, whilst other groups support a local centre for homeless

people and a local day-care centre. Pupils visit many places of interest both locally and further afield. Regular matches are played against teams from other schools. Residential visits to Buxton and France take place as well as sports tours both abroad and within the United Kingdom. The school organises a family ski holiday for pupils and their parents. Many visitors come to the school to give talks and demonstrations to enhance the curriculum in PSHE and in other areas. The school raises money for a range of charities both nearby and further afield. These include Birmingham Children's Hospital and Education Action International, involving a teacher from the school visiting Sudan. All such experiences and links with the local community contribute greatly to broadening and enhancing pupils' awareness and general education.

- 3.14 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

#### **4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

##### **The Quality of Governance**

- 4.1 The governors of the school are highly committed to the good of the school and its continued development. They are most concerned to provide all pupils with a high quality all-round education where all achieve their full potential in line with the aims of the school. They carry out their role successfully and, through their teaching and learning committee, have developed a greater understanding and oversight of curricular matters than that found at the time of the last inspection, although some work remains to be done in this area.
- 4.2 The governing body has a clearly defined structure and appropriate management arrangements. This enables the governors to be in a strong position to oversee the work of the school. In certain areas they are particularly successful, most notably in their awareness of their legal and financial responsibilities. Consequently, thorough financial planning is in place. The outcome of this is effective educational provision and considerable ongoing investment in the buildings, staffing and general resources of the school. Whilst steps have been taken to improve their knowledge and understanding of curriculum developments and in their monitoring of standards within the school, they are still insufficiently well informed about the ongoing quality of the education the pupils receive, though steps are being taken to address this issue.
- 4.3 A number of governors have contact with members of staff, through both formal and informal channels, and are supportive of them. Generally, governors keep in touch with the progress of the school through developing communications systems. Senior managers of the school keep governors well informed about developments, and they are consequently able to play more of a leading rather than simply supportive role in many areas of school life. Sound advice and growing levels of challenge are provided to the senior managers of the school. However, this is less evident with regard to other members of staff.

##### **The Quality of Leadership and Management**

- 4.4 Effective leadership and management are provided by the senior staff of the school. This enables the school's aim of helping pupils to achieve their

full potential to be realised. Much of their success is reflected in the quality of education the school provides and in the care it takes of its pupils. The last inspection identified many strengths in this area. They have largely been maintained and, in several areas, successfully built upon.

- 4.5 Senior managers have a good oversight of the work of the school and provide a clear sense of direction. A senior management team and heads of department in the preparatory section and curriculum coordinators in the pre-preparatory area are in place. However, their roles and responsibilities are not sufficiently well defined, particularly concerning their monitoring of the work of the whole school, the quality of teaching and the work pupils produce. Furthermore, whilst some heads of department and subject coordinators have a whole school perspective of the development and progress of pupils in their subjects, this is certainly not the case in all subject areas. Consequently, systematic procedures to monitor teaching and the curriculum are not fully in place.
- 4.6 The general quality of the school development plan has been maintained since the last inspection. However, it lacks the appropriately detailed planning that is necessary to ensure that senior managers and governors have a sufficiently effective oversight of the review and development of the curriculum and other aspects of school life over the next three to four years. Details such as timings, success criteria, personnel involvement and costings are lacking.
- 4.7 Good quality policies to cover many aspects of school life are in place. Systems are in place to check, as deemed necessary, the effectiveness of the various procedures. For example, regular checks are made on issues such as health and safety, as well as child protection, to ensure that appropriate measures are being followed.
- 4.8 The school has excellent resources, which are located near areas where they are needed and are effectively managed and used. The libraries are also well stocked and managed. They are used appropriately by staff and pupils and make a most valuable contribution to pupils' learning. Procedures for budgeting operate extremely efficiently.
- 4.9 Teaching and support staff are deployed effectively throughout the school. Good staffing levels ensure that high quality support is given to all pupils, especially those requiring support to overcome their difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff recruitment is well managed, the statutory staffing checks are made and necessary records securely kept.
- 4.10 New staff, including when appropriate recently qualified teachers, have an effective induction programme that supports them well. In-service training opportunities are available for staff, although these are not always sufficiently closely linked to the school development planning process. A system for staff appraisal is in place, although it is more effective in the pre-preparatory department than elsewhere in the school.
- 4.11 The high quality assistance and support provided by the administrative and other support staff ensures that the school operates efficiently. Adequate communications systems are in place, although care needs to be taken to ensure that all staff are well informed at all times regarding practice and any changes that may take place.

- 4.12 The school is located on one extensive site. Particularly good use is made of the high quality facilities it possesses. Good quality teaching space is available and is well used throughout the school, not least by the older pupils, to whom a wide range of specialist accommodation is available. Outstanding provision is made for both outdoor and indoor games.
- 4.13 The school is a most welcoming place, and every reasonable step is taken to provide a secure environment for pupils' education. In discussion and as a result of the questionnaire conducted with the pupils, it is clear that they are extremely happy with their school and proud of it.
- 4.14 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.15 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

### **Overall Conclusions**

- 5.1 The Blue Coat School provides a good quality of education for its pupils. It has many strong features, some of which are outstanding.
- 5.2 The school achieves its aims and meets the needs of its pupils effectively. Wide-ranging opportunities are provided in order to enable pupils to achieve their potential. Achievement levels are high in many subjects, most notably in English, mathematics, science and music. Outside the formal curriculum, the extensive extra-curricular programme also plays a significant part in enabling pupils to achieve their full potential. Good quality and, on occasions, outstanding teaching, a well-balanced curriculum, effective leadership and the exceptionally good relationships that exist within the school, enable considerable achievements to be made by the pupils.
- 5.3 The pupils are proud of their school and play their own part in the successful life of the school. They are responsible members of the school community and behave very well. Pupils are exceptionally well cared for and highly successful provision is made for their personal development.
- 5.4 Many of the strengths, found at the time of the last inspection in 2001 have been built upon, and weaknesses have largely been removed. The school is aware that there is room for further improvement in relation to the whole school roles of heads of departments and curriculum coordinators, as well as in establishing a more effective system to monitor the work of the school. In addition, some work is also needed in relation to development planning and in extending the opportunities, as appropriate, for the use of ICT.
- 5.5 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

### **Next Steps**

- 5.6 The school has no major weaknesses. To continue to improve it should:
1. continue to develop the roles and responsibilities of senior managers, heads of departments and subject coordinators in order to

- further develop a system where all have a clear understanding of what their work entails and the role they play in the on-going development of the whole school;
- ensure that through detailed development planning there is a systematic approach to monitoring the review and development of all aspects of school life, including the curricular over a three or four year period, and;
- seek opportunities for the application of pupils' ICT skills to other subjects.

5.7 No action in respect of regulatory requirements is required.

## **6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

6.1 The inspection was carried out from 29<sup>th</sup> January to 1<sup>st</sup> February 2007. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons, and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents and pupils to a pre-inspection questionnaire were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

### **List of Inspectors**

Mr. Graham Nunn	Reporting Inspector
Mrs. Madhu McChrystal	Head of Department, IAPS School
Mr. Paul Scripps	Head of Department, IAPS School
Mrs. Jane Tuckett	Head of School, GSA School
Mr. David Westcombe	Headmaster, IAPS School
Mr. Gareth Williams	Deputy Headmaster, IAPS School