

Inspection of Blacon High School, A Specialist Sports College

Melbourne Road, Blacon, Chester, Cheshire CH1 5JH

Inspection dates: 28 and 29 November 2023, and 7 and 8
February 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are typically happy in school. They feel safe and well cared for because of the nurturing environment that staff provide. The school takes a proactive approach to supporting those pupils who struggle to engage with their education. Nevertheless, while pupils' rates of attendance are improving, some pupils do not attend school as often as they should.

The school wants the best for pupils, irrespective of their personal circumstances or the challenges they may face. To this end, the school has ensured that pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), access a suitably ambitious curriculum. However, due to flaws in how the curriculum was designed in the past, some older pupils have acquired gaps in their learning. Added to this, there remain some inconsistencies in how well the curriculum is delivered. As a result, by the end of key stage 4, some pupils lack the knowledge that they need to succeed in national examinations.

The school has rigorous and appropriate processes for managing pupils' unacceptable behaviour. In the main, staff and pupils said that, since the previous inspection, pupils' behaviour has improved. This means that, during lessons, pupils can focus on their learning. Typically, classrooms are calm, and pupils behave sensibly during social times.

Many pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, appreciate the wealth of wider opportunities on offer. For example, older pupils are keen to support their younger peers in their roles as mentors. Others enjoy participating in a range of extra-curricular activities they may not have experienced before, such as rowing.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school and the governing body have an accurate understanding of those aspects of the quality of education that they need to develop further. For example, the school has acted successfully to provide a more ambitious curriculum for pupils in key stage 3. In addition, the school has also ensured that teachers are typically clear about the knowledge that pupils should learn and when this content should be delivered. Increasingly, this is supporting staff to design appropriate learning for pupils.

Typically, staff are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. Some staff use their expertise well to design suitable learning activities for pupils. However, other staff lack the confidence to design learning that supports pupils to learn aspects of the curriculum. Some staff are not fully equipped to check that pupils have remembered and understood earlier curriculum content. This prevents some pupils from building securely on what they have learned previously.

The school has high numbers of pupils with SEND. It manages the identification and assessment of these pupils' additional needs well. For example, in key stage 3, a

small number of pupils with SEND benefit from carefully considered support to help them with the transition to secondary school. The school has ensured that staff receive sufficient information about how to adapt their delivery of the curriculum successfully for pupils with SEND. However, weaknesses in the delivery of the curriculum mean that some pupils with SEND do not achieve as well as they could.

The school accurately identifies those pupils who struggle with reading. However, the support for these pupils, particularly those in key stage 4, is not as effective as it could be. This is because some of these pupils do not attend as regularly as they should. This prevents these pupils from catching up with their reading knowledge quickly.

The school has recently strengthened its approach to improving pupils' rates of attendance. While the impact of this approach is tangible for many younger pupils, some older pupils do not attend school as often as they should.

Typically, the atmosphere around the site is calm and orderly. During lessons, most pupils listen attentively to their teachers and follow instructions carefully. The school provides carefully considered support to help those pupils who find it more difficult to regulate their own behaviour.

The school provides an appropriate programme to support pupils' personal development. Pupils learn about age-appropriate aspects of topics and issues that are relevant to them. Staff receive suitable training and guidance to deliver the personal, social, health and economic education curriculum. This helps pupils to be well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils are suitably informed about the careers and further education opportunities that are available to them. The school supports pupils to be aspirational for their next steps.

For the most part, staff appreciate that they are consulted about how new initiatives impact on their workload. The school has carefully balanced the well-being of staff while introducing the improvements necessary to develop the quality of education that pupils receive further. The school has taken decisive and appropriate action to implement accurate improvement priorities since the previous inspection. However, from time to time, the school does not check on the impact of aspects of its work as effectively as it could.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- At times, staff lack the confidence that they need to deliver aspects of the curriculum well. This hinders some pupils, including those with SEND, from

learning the curriculum as successfully as they should. The school should ensure that staff are supported to deliver the curriculum as intended.

- In some subjects, staff are unable to check well enough on whether pupils have understood what has been taught. This means that some pupils' misconceptions are not dealt with effectively or quickly enough. The school should ensure that staff are suitably equipped to identify and address pupils' misconceptions before introducing new learning.
- Some pupils, particularly in key stage 4, do not attend school often enough. This interrupts these pupils' learning and prevents them from achieving as well as they should. It also prevents some of them from overcoming the gaps in their reading knowledge. The school should ensure that it removes the barriers that prevent these pupils from attending school regularly.
- From time to time, the school does not evaluate the impact of aspects of its work effectively enough. This hinders the school in prioritising those strategies that are most effective in driving forward improvements. The school should ensure that it checks fully on how its actions impact positively on the quality of education that pupils receive and use this information to inform its next steps.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	111396
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10294275
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	716
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chairs of governing body	Nigel Pell-Ilderton and Andy Brown
Headteacher	Rachel Hudson
Website	www.blaconhighschool.net
Dates of previous inspection	19 and 20 October 2021, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school uses one registered and four unregistered alternative providers for a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. An additional visit was made to the school on 7 and 8 February 2024 to gather additional evidence.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other leaders and staff.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the local governing body.
- An inspector spoke to representatives of the local authority and a consultant who works with the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, history, design and technology, and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils’ work. An inspector also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experience of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils’ behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils’ interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses shared through Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted’s online surveys for pupils and staff.
- The inspectors reviewed a wide range of evidence, including the school’s self-evaluation documents and records relating to pupils’ behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Sally Rix, lead inspector	His Majesty’s Inspector
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Gil Bourgade	Ofsted Inspector
Neil Johnson	Ofsted Inspector
Emma Gregory, lead inspector	His Majesty’s Inspector
Jenny Jones	His Majesty’s Inspector

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