



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Report for a Material Change Visit

Reading Blue Coat School

October 2021

School's details

School name	Reading Blue Coat School			
DfE number	872/6006			
Registered charity number	1087839			
Address	Reading Blue Coat School Holme Park Sonning Lane Sonning on Thames Reading Berkshire RG4 6SU			
Telephone number	0118 9441005			
Email address	reception@rbcs.org.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Peter Thomas			
Chair of governors	Mr Peter Bertram			
Age Range	11 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	821			
	Lower School	194	Middle School	325
	Sixth Form	302		
Date of visit	21 October 2021			

1. Introduction

Characteristics of the school

- 1.1 Reading Blue Coat School is an independent day school located in Sonning, near the town of Reading. The school is registered for male pupils aged between 11 and 18, and for female pupils in the sixth form. The school is owned by the Reading Blue Coat School Charitable Trust and overseen by a board of governors. The school has 103 pupils who require support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), all of whom receive additional specialist help. No pupil has an education, health and care plan or English as an additional language. The school's previous inspection was a focused compliance and educational quality inspection in November 2019.

Purpose of the visit

- 1.2 This was an announced material change visit at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) to assess the school's proposal to increase its capacity to 850 pupils. The visit focused on the school's compliance with the following Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs).

Regulations which were the focus of the visit	Team judgements
Part 3, paragraph 7 (safeguarding)	Not met
Part 3, paragraph 9 (behaviour)	Not met
Part 3, paragraph 11 (health and safety)	Met
Part 3, paragraph 12 (fire safety)	Met
Part 3, paragraph 14 (supervision of pupils)	Met
Part 3, paragraph 16 (risk assessment)	Met
Part 4, paragraphs 18-21 (suitability of staff)	Met
Part 5, paragraph 23 (toilet, washing and changing facilities)	Met
Part 5, paragraph 24 (accommodation for medical needs)	Met
Part 5, paragraph 25 (maintenance of premises and accommodation)	Not met
Part 5, paragraph 26 (acoustics)	Met
Part 5, paragraph 27 (internal and external lighting)	Met
Part 5, paragraph 28 (drinking water and water supply)	Met
Part 5, paragraph 29 (outdoor space for PE and play)	Met
Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c) (publication of safeguarding policy)	Met
Part 8, paragraph 34 (leadership and management)	Not met

2. Inspection findings

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 7]

Safeguarding policy

- 2.1 The school does not meet the requirements.
- 2.2 The school's policy for safeguarding does not provide suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school because it does not include details of the school's arrangements for reporting, recording and responding to allegations of low-level concerns about adults working in the school.

Safeguarding implementation

- 2.3 The school does not meet the standard.
- 2.4 The school promotes the safeguarding of its pupils effectively in many areas. Appointment of a safeguarding lead and deputies is appropriate. Staff are confident about reporting their concerns about pupils and do so effectively; records of these are kept. The school liaises effectively with parents and external agencies in order to promote the welfare of its pupils. Appropriate external advice is sought with suitable promptness when allegations are made against adults who work in the school.
- 2.5 Some low-level concerns about adults have not been reported to school leaders by staff. This indicates that, although staff have been required to read the most recent version of *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (KCSIE) they have not fully understood requirements in this area. Training, together with the deficiencies in the safeguarding policy, has not ensured sufficient understanding. The governing body maintains oversight through regular reports to the board and an annual review of policy and practice but this review is not sufficiently effective because the current safeguarding policy omits some required elements.
- 2.6 Discussions with pupils indicated that provision in school policies to minimise racial harassment as an aspect of pupil-on-pupil abuse is implemented effectively, and records confirm that procedures are implemented effectively to recognise and respond to concerns relating to pupils' mental health.
- 2.7 Evidence gathered in pupil interviews does not confirm the effective implementation of policies designed to minimise peer-on-peer abuse with regard to sexual harassment with regard to both gender identity and sexual orientation. The school has initiated strategies designed to support pupils in this regard, but their effectiveness is limited because pupils lack confidence that their concerns will be acted upon if reported to some staff, due to the reaction they encounter when doing so. This indicates inconsistent adherence by some members of staff to the staff code of conduct.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – behaviour [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 9]

- 2.8 The school does not meet the standard.
- 2.9 The school recognises the need to promote good behaviour and this is reflected in the recently reviewed behaviour policy and associated strategies. Instances of misbehaviour in most areas, including those which occur outside school, are dealt with in line with the school's policy and appropriate sanctions are employed, as are rewards to promote good behaviour.
- 2.10 However, implementation of the policy is not consistent, particularly with regard to instances of inappropriate comments relating to gender identity and sexual orientation. A record is kept of sanctions for serious misbehaviour, but the use of such records to identify patterns or trends in behaviour and make appropriate adjustments to behaviour strategies is too limited in scope.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – health and safety [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 11]

- 2.11 The school meets the standard.
- 2.12 Procedures to maintain health and safety are consistent with those required by relevant legislation and are implemented effectively. Evidence indicates that the standard is likely to continue to be met should the material change be approved.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – fire safety [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 12]

- 2.13 The school meets the standard.
- 2.14 Appropriate measures are in place to comply with the requirements for fire safety. In particular, arrangements in the buildings designated to be used by additional pupils envisaged in the sixth form indicate that the standard is likely to continue to be met should the material change be approved.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – supervision of pupils [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 14]

- 2.15 The school meets the standard.
- 2.16 The number of staff available to supervise the pupils is appropriate for the current number of pupils in the school. Evidence indicates that the standard is likely to continue to be met should the material change be approved.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – risk assessment [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 16]

- 2.17 The school meets the standard.
- 2.18 Appropriate risk assessments are implemented in the school. Those in place for the buildings to be used by the additional pupils envisaged in the sixth form, indicate that the standard is likely to continue to be met should the material change be approved.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors [ISSR Part 4, paragraphs 18–21]

- 2.19 The school meets the standards.
- 2.20 The school has made appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors and a register is kept as required. Evidence indicates that the standard is likely to continue to be met should the material change be approved.

Premises and accommodation [ISSR Part 5, paragraphs 23, 24 and 26–29]

- 2.21 The standards are met.
- 2.22 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the relevant standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. Acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play. Evidence indicates that these standards are likely to continue to be met should the material change be approved. The school has provided additional space to accommodate the increased number of pupils proposed through the repurposing and adaptation of existing buildings and the construction of a new building. Consideration has been given to the best use of space to ensure appropriate provision is in place for pupils in the proposed larger sixth form as well as younger pupils who will be accommodated in the new block.

Premises and accommodation – maintenance [ISSR Part 5, paragraph 25]

2.23 The school does not meet the standard.

2.24 The premises are not consistently maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety. Some inadequate security arrangements were observed during the inspection.

Provision of information [ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c)]

2.25 The school meets the requirements for providing information relating to safeguarding to parents. Particulars of the arrangements for safeguarding are published on the school's website.

Quality of leadership and management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34]

2.26 The school does not meet the standard.

2.27 School leaders and managers have not demonstrated sufficient skills and knowledge to ensure that the other standards are met, in particular with regard to safeguarding, promoting good behaviour, and maintenance of the school premises, and that they actively promote the well-being of pupils.

3. Regulatory action points

3.1 The school does not meet all of the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and should take immediate action to remedy deficiencies as detailed below.

ISSR Part 3, Welfare, health and safety, paragraph 7

- Include the school's arrangements for dealing with concerns about adults working in the school which do not meet the harms threshold in the safeguarding policy and implement these provisions [paragraph 7(a) and (b)].
- Ensure that staff understand and implement fully the school's expectations of them as stated within the staff code of conduct; that they are trained to recognise signs of sexual harassment in the behaviour of pupils or staff as identified in KCSIE and other relevant guidance [paragraph 7(a) and (b)].
- Ensure that when reports of peer-on-peer abuse, including allegations of sexual harassment, are made by pupils or staff they receive an effective and active response, consistent with the school's policy, so that pupils and staff are able to make such reports with confidence that appropriate action will be taken [paragraph 7(a) and (b)].

ISSR Part 3, Welfare, health and safety, paragraph 9

- Ensure that the school's written behaviour policy is implemented effectively by all staff, including with regard to inappropriate comments with regard to gender identity or sexual orientation [paragraph 9(b)].

ISSR Part 5, Premises and accommodation, paragraph 25

- Ensure that the premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety [paragraph 25].

ISSR Part 34, Leadership and management, paragraph 34

- Ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibility demonstrate good skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are consistently met and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils [paragraph 34(1)(a), (b) and (c)].

4. Recommendation with regard to material change request

- 4.1 The school is suitably prepared for the proposed increase in numbers in terms of accommodation, having taken care to ensure appropriate space is provided for the purposes of study, relaxation and catering for pupils in the growing sixth form. The construction of an additional building is nearing completion to provide pastoral space for younger pupils, whose previous building has been allocated to the older pupils, and appropriate temporary accommodation is in place until this is ready. Provision in most areas of the regulations is likely to be compliant when additional numbers of pupils are admitted.
- 4.2 However, it cannot be recommended that the material change be approved because the school does not currently meet all the regulatory requirements, in particular with regard to safeguarding, the promotion of good behaviour, maintenance of the premises and leadership and management.

5. Summary of evidence

- 5.1 The inspector held discussions with the headmaster, senior leaders and other members of staff and met with the chair of governors. They visited different areas of the school, and talked with groups of pupils. She scrutinised a range of documentation, records and policies.