

Co-education in Year 7 from 2023: Pastoral FAQs

Following the transition to co-education in Year 7 from September 2023, will girls and boys be looked after together, or separately?

Students will generally be looked after together at Reading Blue Coat in nearly all circumstances; examples of exceptions, which would be rare, could include circumstances where there is a safeguarding reason for separate care (e.g., in gender separate rooms on a school trip). Tutor groups will be mixed, allowing male and female students to form firm friendships right from the start. Pastoral activities, such as societies, will be consistently gender-integrated.

Is the pastoral ethos at Blue Coat be suitable for both girls and boys?

The pastoral ethos at Blue Coat derives from our core values: aspiration, courage, compassion, service, and integrity. We believe that these values are universal and should shape a very happy school life for girls and boys equally. Our approach to pastoral care focuses on firm knowledge of the individual, supportive and trusting relationships with staff, and open, compassionate conversations with students. Tutors, Heads of Year, and Directors of Section ensure that there is always a pastoral team working together to support each child. We believe that this individual, child-centred approach is right for all students.

Are there staff my child can talk to about their worries?

Each student at Blue Coat has a tutor, whom they will see regularly throughout the week. Tutors will keep a close eye on students and offer an encouraging source of support. Year 7 students will also receive wonderful guidance from Mrs Crossland – our highly-experienced and kind Head of Year 7, who is expert in the transition to secondary school. From Year 8, the year group will then be joined by a new Head of Year, who will stay with them for the journey through the school (even into Sixth Form) and become an expert in that year group. However, there are plenty of other people that children can speak with – the school's nurses, mentors, counsellors, or any teacher that a student trusts (all are trained to a high standard). The pastoral team at Blue Coat is an even mix of male and female staff – the staff here feels very much co-educational.

Do staff have the right knowledge to look after girls as well as boys, following the transition to co-education in Year 7?

Our Sixth Form has been co-educational for some decades and so all staff are familiar with teaching girls and boys. Many staff at Blue Coat are highly experienced in working in a co-educational environment from previous roles in fully co-educational schools. Our staff were enthusiastic about the change and are open and curious about best practice across the sector, making them well prepared for the arrival of Year 7 girls in 2023. Recent staff training has included mental health, sexual citizenship, unconscious bias, and LGBTQ+ inclusion. Key pastoral staff receive additional, specialist training in regular seminars.

Are there suitable facilities where Year 7 girls and boys can feel comfortable?

Our Lower School Common Room (opened in September 2021) provides a fresh and welcoming space for the new students. It is situated in the site to give a sense of being a smaller, welcoming community. Our medical facilities have also been re-developed, and re-opened in September 2023, to provide a new, broader function Well-being Centre. There are also new changing and toilet facilities that are modern, safe, and appropriate. We are very fortunate to have a beautiful, open and historic site by the Thames, which can meet the interests and requirements of a diverse body of students.

Following the transition to co-education in Year 7 from September 2023, how will the School make sure that Year 7 girls feel welcomed and integrated?

The current student body was very welcoming to the arrival of Year 7 girls in September 2023. Standards of behaviour and inclusivity are excellent. Lower School students receive a programme of assemblies and tutorials to explore themes of welcome, equality, and gender empathy. All new Year 7 girls also benefit from support from Sixth Form mentors, as we train our Year 12 girls to provide proactive support and role-modelling. We also worked with leading experts in the process of transition to full co-education, to ensure we could draw on best practices and the experiences of other schools in making the new girls feel welcome.

How will the House system benefit my child?

Each child will be assigned to a tutor group which is also aligned with one of our six Houses: Aldworth, Hall, Malthus, Norwood, Rich, and West. The Houses provide a community and identity for students that cuts across year groups. They give opportunities for Lower School students to interact with older students in an enjoyable, low-pressure way. Houses focus on co-curriculum enjoyment and contribution to school life, with recent events encompassing a wide range of sports, academic enrichment, performing arts, values and inclusion, and so on. The Houses are a distinctive, fun part of the Blue Coat experience.

How will the school monitor social and behavioural issues?

Blue Coat students are generally very well behaved and quickly make strong friendships. However, we closely monitor what is going on and intervene effectively when necessary. The three Sections of the School (Lower, Middle, Sixth Form) meet at least weekly for monitoring discussions of students, sharing information and agreeing actions to support individuals. This includes the tracking of social and behavioural dynamics in year groups, with Heads of Year and tutors then playing a leading role in building cohesive, happy groups. Blue Coat students will make mistakes along the way – as in any school – and staff will be firm but encouraging in responding to such incidents. There is no tolerance for bullying or harassment at Blue Coat, and these issues are carefully logged and tackled very swiftly and robustly. Our aim is always to restore students to better behavioural norms and stronger relationships, as all benefit from a safe, happy community.

How does the school ensure a culture of kindness and inclusion?

Blue Coat regularly rewards and celebrates positive and inclusive attitudes, for example awarding 'values points' (in the same way that academic points are awarded) for our core values of aspiration, courage, compassion, service, and integrity. The Directors of Section also award values certificates in assemblies, to recognise kind and supportive behaviour. Students have a warm rapport with their tutors and can expect praise and encouragement for showing a positive attitude.

How will attending Reading Blue Coat school benefit my child's well-being?

Reading Blue Coat provides a unique experience like no other day school locally – a day that is packed with learning, activities, culture, sport, and time with friends. With beautiful grounds and facilities, Blue Coat enables young students to explore a wide range of interests and engage in activities which bring them out of themselves. Blue Coat is fun and challenging and provides a community which is based on a strong ethos of common values. It provides diverse opportunities for a sense of self-fulfillment and pride, allowing all students to find their own ways to flourish. Students here are happy and well prepared for the next stage in life.