

Inspection of a good school: Blackfen School for Girls

Blackfen Road, Sidcup, Kent DA15 9NU

Inspection dates:

17–18 December 2019

Outcome

Blackfen School for Girls continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

All pupils study a wide range of subjects. They also participate in rich and engaging activities to support their wider personal development. The extra-curricular DICE ('discover, initiate, challenge, elite') programme provides a wide range of opportunities to try something new or enhance a skill. Pupils develop confidence in themselves as young people and as learners. This reflects the school's aim of 'raising aspirations and releasing potential'.

The headteacher greets every pupil he meets by name. Pupils really appreciate this. They say it makes them feel they belong. They also like being in mixed-age community groups because it helps them to get to know pupils from across the school.

Pupils feel safe because of the good relationships that exist between them, their peers and adults. They know who to approach if they have a worry or concern. They are sure there will always be someone to help them resolve any issues that arise.

Pupils said they are not judged if things go wrong, instead they get help to put them right. They are proud to be members of their school and want the school to be proud of them too. Alumni keep in contact with the school and continue to share their successes.

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

Leaders have a clear rationale for what is taught at the school. They provide a 'broad, balanced and aspirational curriculum' for all pupils. In Years 7 to 9, pupils study the full national curriculum. They also follow programmes in drama and dance. In Years 10 and 11, pupils are able to choose courses from a comprehensive offer, including vocational courses. At the end of Year 11 pupils achieve in line with the national average. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including those who attend the resource base, follow the full curriculum.

The inclusive sixth form provides a wide range of subjects and pathways for students. Academic and vocational courses are available. For example, there are three different law courses that students can choose from. This enables many pupils to continue their studies at the school, including those with SEND.

Curriculum leaders have identified the most important knowledge and skills that pupils need to succeed. In most subject areas these are well planned and sequenced. Leaders are beginning to consider how links can be made across different areas of the curriculum to support the connection of pupils' knowledge across the curriculum.

In Years 7, 8 and 9 there is a strong focus on reading. Challenge is provided through the variety and breadth of texts studied. This prepares pupils well for their studies at GCSE and beyond. In mathematics, the curriculum is being redesigned. Leaders have introduced a more demanding programme to enable pupils to achieve more swiftly. Work in Year 7 builds more explicitly on what pupils have studied at primary school. Leaders have identified gaps in older pupils' mathematical learning. These are being addressed to support better GCSE outcomes for all pupils.

History is well planned and sequenced. This enables pupils to develop their understanding of historical themes over time. In languages, the programme for teaching Spanish is being developed so that it mirrors the more successful curriculum in French.

School leaders are also committed to pupils' wider development. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 follow the school's politics, philosophy and enterprise (PPE) programme. They learn about democracy, globalisation and campaigning. Debates and discussion allow opportunities for views to be challenged. As a result of these studies, pupils are well prepared for life in the modern world. Pupils enjoy these lessons and know they are a distinctive feature of their school.

All pupils have access to a comprehensive programme of extra-curricular clubs. These run before, during and after the school day. A wide range of trips and activities is on offer during the academic year. These encourage pupils to think about their futures and raise their aspirations. However, the school has not evaluated the uptake of these opportunities. Leaders do not know if all pupils are genuinely broadening their experiences through this programme.

Pupils show respect and consideration for others. They demonstrate the positive social behaviours modelled by staff both in and out of the classroom. Pupils told us that they enjoy school and that it is generally a calm place to be.

Teachers said that leaders are sensitive to issues relating to their workload and that they feel supported. They appreciate the regular opportunities to raise issues and concerns with senior staff. They said that they feel listened to. In response to the staff survey, almost all staff stated that they enjoy working at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff receive regular training on a range of safeguarding issues. This includes how to support young people affected by domestic violence and extremism. Staff are also updated on risks in the local community. This is so that they can recognise the signs that might suggest a pupil needs help. It gives them the skills and confidence to address concerns that arise. They can direct pupils to more specialist support.

Pupils follow a planned programme on how to keep safe. The curriculum is age-appropriate, and covers subjects including personal safety and risk-taking. External agencies such as the police and school nurse support the delivery of some sessions.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders in mathematics and Spanish have introduced redesigned curriculum plans. They have also identified gaps in pupils' learning and are addressing these. Leaders should ensure that these plans and these actions lead to improvements in pupils' achievement in these subjects, including at GCSE.
- The school provides a broad enrichment offer. Pupil participation is not evaluated. Leaders should track which activities individuals take part in. This is to make sure that all pupils, particularly those with SEND or who are disadvantaged, have opportunities to enhance their life experiences.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good/outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Blackfen School for Girls, to be good on 23–24 November 2011.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	137965
Local authority	Bexley
Inspection number	10110418
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,398
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	320
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Stuart Fitz-Gerald
Headteacher	Matthew Brown
Website	www.blackfenschoolforgirls.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	1 March 2016

Information about this school

- Blackfen School for Girls is a non-selective school for girls aged 11 to 16. It has a mixed sixth form.
- The school is significantly larger than the averaged sized school.
- There is an on-site resource provision unit for 16 pupils with SEND who have visual impairment or speech, language and communication needs.
- The school uses alternative provision at Horizons Academy.

Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, faculty leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils. We met with five members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.

- The inspection focused in detail on English, mathematics, science, history and languages. We met with curriculum leaders and teachers from these subjects, visited lessons, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at their work.
- We held meetings to discuss curriculum plans in law and PPE, which includes citizenship.
- The school's records on the checks made prior to employing staff were scrutinised. Meetings were held with staff who have responsibility for safeguarding at the school.
- We took account of 84 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as correspondence relating to the school. We also considered 62 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Katerina Christodoulou, lead inspector	Seconded Inspector
Jo Jones	Ofsted Inspector
Anne Murray-Hudson	Ofsted Inspector

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