

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Blundell's Preparatory School

November 2022

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School's Details

School	Blundell's P	reparatory S	school		
DfE number	878/6012	878/6012			
Registered charity number	1081249	1081249			
Address	Milestones Blundell's R Tiverton Devon				
Telephone number		01884 252393			
Email address	prep@blun	prep@blundells.org			
Headteacher	Mr Andrew	Mr Andrew Southgate			
Chair of governors	Mr Nigel Ha	Mr Nigel Hall			
Age range	2 to 11	2 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	255				
	Nursery	26	Pre-prep	85	
	Prep	144			
Inspection dates	22 to 24 No	22 to 24 November 2022			

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1. Background Information

About the school

1.1 Situated near Tiverton in Devon, Blundell's Preparatory School is an independent co-educational day school. It was founded in 1929 as St Aubyn's School for Boys, acquired by Blundell's Charitable Trust in 2000, and changed its name in 2006. The school has its own governing committee which reports to the full governing body of the senior school. The school comprises the nursery for 2- to 4-year-olds, the pre-prep for 4- to 7-year-olds and the prep for 7- to 11-year-olds.

1.2 Since the previous inspection, the school has developed its site and its educational provision. Engineering and outdoor learning have been added to the timetable and there has been a focus on helping pupils to develop personalised learning strategies. Developments to the prep site have included a dance studio, music department, enhancements to the information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and a science laboratory.

What the school seeks to do

1.3 The school strives to build a community which encourages all its members to develop a healthy respect for each other. It seeks to provide a happy, stimulating and caring environment where there are opportunities, encouragement and stimuli to develop each pupil to their full potential.

About the pupils

1.4 Pupils come from a range of professional, farming and business families living within a 10-mile radius of the school. Data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is broadly average compared with pupils taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 53 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), 19 of whom receive additional specialist help. No pupil has an education, health and care plan (EHCP) or English as an additional language (EAL). Data used by the school have identified 25 pupils as being the most able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as <u>met</u> or as <u>not met</u>. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: <u>The Education (Independent School Standards)</u> Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework.

Key findings

2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards)
Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years
Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 - Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are

appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

- 2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.
- 2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

- 2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.
- 2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.
- 2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
 - Pupils' communication skills are excellent; they are highly articulate, expressing themselves with clarity and panache.
 - Pupils across the school display sophisticated study skills for their age, drawing knowledge from a variety of sources.
 - Pupils demonstrate strong numeracy skills and are highly proficient at applying these in other areas of learning.
 - Pupils are extremely enthusiastic learners who strive for high standards in their work.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
 - Pupils are exceptionally well behaved and show enormous integrity.
 - Pupils are highly sociable, friendly and cooperative with each other and adults.
 - Pupils have an excellent understanding of what it means to be healthy and how to keep safe.
 - Pupils are confident and resilient, understanding that making mistakes is part of learning.

Recommendation

- 3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.
 - Enable pupils to apply their study skills in even more meaningful ways by providing extra opportunities for independent, enquiry-led learning.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Data provided by the school indicate that the overall attainment of pupils in English and mathematics is above the national average. Observations of learning and scrutiny of work confirm this, and also that pupils' attainment in the broader curriculum is similarly high. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) make strong progress from their starting points, and this continues when they enter Year 1. Pupils' progress in English and mathematics is strong overall and, in some cases, very strong, showing significant uplift over time. Any adverse effects on attainment and progress due to pandemic restrictions have been swiftly rectified, due to high-quality planning along with assiduous monitoring of outcomes and opportunities for intervention. There is no significant difference in attainment and progress between female and male pupils. Those pupils with SEND make at least expected progress and, in some cases, strong progress. All parents who responded to the pre-

- inspection questionnaire agreed that the range of subjects is suitable for their children and almost all agreed that teaching enables their children to make progress and that their children's individual educational needs are met effectively.
- 3.6 Pupils are consummate communicators in the spoken and written word. From the very youngest children in Reception who are exceptionally keen to take visitors on a tour of their classroom, to representatives of Year 6 who confidently stand in assembly and share information about the upcoming Christmas Fair, pupils speak confidently, articulately and with great maturity, conveying their messages with purpose and emphatic meaning. Pupils have a genuine love of reading. Encouraged by the Accelerated Reading scheme and accompanying reward system, they are highly motivated, demonstrating a passion for books, explaining animatedly how they could become 'Word Millionaires' as part of the scheme. Pupils are also excellent listeners, giving each other time and space to express their opinions in discussions. Year 2 pupils were able to write a succinct explanation of why, when adding multiple quantities, it was easiest to start with the biggest number. Year 3 pupils demonstrated all four communication skills at once, most effectively during a French lesson when they wandered the classroom wishing each other *bonjour* and using the target language to enquire which their favourite animal was, then writing the result on a tally sheet. The rich curriculum provides a wealth of opportunity for pupils to develop their excellent communication skills.
- 3.7 Pupils develop their study skills to a high level by the time they leave the school; they demonstrate a thirst for learning which was patently evident through their keen engagement in all lessons observed. Scrutiny of work confirmed competent skills of analysis where investigative work also resulted in reasonable hypotheses being created and valid conclusions drawn, for instance, in an enquiry into solubility. Pupils in Year 4 hypothesised that polystyrene would be the best sound insulator because it is the most 'airy' so the sound vibrations will travel the worst. Pupils explained how they used the VIPERS acronym (vocabulary, inference, prediction, explain, retrieval and summary) to ensure high quality responses in English comprehension. In discussions and observations, pupils also displayed an excellent understanding and use of correct technical language. This included correct use of more advanced vocabulary, such as dependent and independent variables in Year 6 science and pizzicato in Year 3 music, to describe their learning. Effective teaching and hands-on experience during a World War 1 history morning, ensured that the pupils gained an excellent understanding of why changes were made to fencing on the Frontline. In creating canopic jars in art, Year 3 demonstrated an excellent ability to synthesise information learnt in history about hieroglyphics and apply it to the creation of their jars. Teachers' willingness to tackle advanced concepts and to challenge perceived wisdom on pupils' abilities to comprehend sophisticated constructs leads to these superlative outcomes.
- 3.8 Pupils' numerical development is strong across all ages. A thoroughly well-planned curriculum and skilful teaching promotes excellence in this area. Pupils acquire concrete understanding of concepts from an early age. For example, in Year 6 pupils applied their mathematical knowledge to create excellent line graphs to explain water evaporation over time. They also apply their mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding well to solve problems: Year 5 pupils used their excellent tables knowledge to investigate square numbers, successfully predicting the correct outcomes for given number squares; Year 4 pupils were seen to use their prodigious mental arithmetic skills to give correct answers to questions such as 30x11 almost instantly. During a Year 4 design and technology (DT) lesson, pupils applied their knowledge of nets of 3D shapes when creating their own packaging.
- 3.9 Pupils are extremely enthusiastic learners who were seen to strive for high standards throughout the visit. In all lessons observed, there was a palpable sense of enjoyment and engagement, with determined focus on the task at hand. Year 6 learners confidently selected an appropriate level of challenge in mathematics when completing calculations of equivalent fractions, for instance. An abundance of opportunities across lessons allows pupils to be highly effective at working collaboratively. They explained to inspectors that working with others means that more heads create better ideas, increasing the likelihood of a successful outcome. In physical education (PE), pupils in

Year 2 showed great enjoyment working together in pairs to successfully use their bodies to create different shapes and numbers. Younger children bubbled with enthusiasm as they returned from their 'Wild Wonders' outdoor learning area, explaining how they had used found and provided materials such as ash twigs and pipe cleaners to make their stick man and woman models to complement their classroom-based English learning. Innovative teaching and provision with tasks matched to the full range of abilities in the outdoor learning area ensure a seamless reinforcement of classroom work, successfully engaging and inspiring learners.

- 3.10 All pupils agreed that their skills and knowledge improve in most lessons. From Year 1, pupils being able to identify all the world's continents and correctly naming a split vowel digraph during a science lesson, to Year 4 pupils' careful application of hot wax to their batik dye designs, their knowledge, skills and understanding are strong in all areas of learning. The youngest children have an excellent early grasp of French, ably conversing using 'Bonjour mes amis' and 'Je m'appelle...'. Pupils explained, in discussions, how they use their mathematics skills in science when measuring for practical investigations, and their ICT skills in engineering when coding instructions for their model Ferris wheels. Pupils in Year 3 showed an excellent understanding of standard musical notation whilst playing a newly learned musical piece in their whole-class violin lesson. Pupils also demonstrate an excellent ability to be creative and use their imaginations. This was evidenced in a Year 4 drama lesson where the pupils described the park scene that they could 'see' in front of them. Although teaching encourages pupils to find the answers for themselves, rather than asking for help immediately, scrutiny of work reveals less evidence of more independent, enquiry-led research which might result from implementation of these skills.
- 3.11 Pupils make effective use of ICT to support their learning across the curriculum. Children in Nursery thoroughly enjoyed programming their *Three Billy Goats Gruff* robots around a course created for them. Reception children were observed cosily tucked up in their Gruffalo Café home corner, independently scanning QR codes to access storybooks to read and being totally absorbed exploring letters and sounds. Year 4 pupils related going on a virtual tour of the Pharaoh's pyramids. Older pupils described, in discussions, how they use word processing to edit their creative writing or to film weather reports on their tablet computers in geography, while Year 6 pupils explained using the internet to research and compare the relative merits of the Severn Barrage and Hinkley 'C' power station proposals. Ready access to individual devices, where these are available, ensures high-quality reinforcement of learning.
- 3.12 Pupils enjoy success in a wide range of academic, sporting and cultural activities. The majority make a successful transition to the senior school by the end of Year 6, including a good number of competitive academic and music awards. Pupils participate and gain plaudits in local, regional and national literary, sports, swimming, mathematics, science and artistic competitions. Many pupils play a musical instrument and opt to take NEA and ABRSM examinations, with a significant number gaining distinction grades. All parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school provides a suitable range of extra-curricular activities. The school's governance and leadership have ensured that pupils have sufficient opportunities both to expand and to excel in their personal interests, successfully meeting the stated aim of providing a happy, stimulating and caring environment where there are opportunities, encouragement and stimuli to develop each pupil to their full potential.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils are exceptionally well behaved and show enormous integrity, understanding and respect for rules both in school and in wider society. They are unfailingly polite; throughout the visit, they were seen to behave towards each other and adults with relaxed affability and palpable respect. They make a point of introducing themselves, extending warm greetings and making genuine enquiries as to how others are. Pupils of all ages are highly conscious of the need for appropriate behaviour and manners,

displaying a mature understanding that everyone has different levels of tolerance. They explained, for example, the strategies that they can use to dissipate tensions if a friend is feeling more sensitive for any reason. Pupils were seen to keep each other and also visitors amused with jokes during wet breaks, rather than succumbing to the frustrations of confinement. The school is successful in meeting its aim to build a community which encourages all its members to develop a healthy respect for each other. All parents agreed that the school actively promotes good behaviour. Leaders have ensured that high expectations, consistency and fairness in approaches to behaviour management are consistently employed across all areas of the school.

- 3.15 This excellent behaviour also promotes pupils' success in being highly sociable, friendly and cooperative with each other and adults. All ages were seen to work together very effectively during the visit, whether engaging in speaking and listening practice in a French lesson with younger pupils, or willingly and efficiently packing away materials and resources following a busy, active batik practical or puppet show rehearsal. Following a creative letter written by a friendly troll concerning some missing goats, the children in Nursery all participated with great enthusiasm and, encouraged by the accompanying adults, worked well as a team in a hunt to find all of the goats hidden around the preprep building. Pupils explained, in discussions, that it was important to be able to work with a variety of people, even if they were not their natural choice of partner. Almost all parents agreed that the school equips their children with the team-working and collaborative skills they need in later life. These outcomes are successfully promoted by teaching and curriculum design which actively encourage pupils to work together to achieve common goals.
- 3.16 Pupils have a deeply ingrained understanding of how to stay safe and healthy, both in broad and in specific terms, be that working with hot wax in DT, working safely online, crossing the road to preprep, or protecting their voices in drama. This is supported by proactive interest and action from governance. Almost all parents agreed that the school safeguards their children effectively and ensures that their children learn in a safe environment. In discussions, pupils spoke willingly and openly about the importance of looking after their mental well-being, describing detailed strategies which they employ to ensure a healthy mental balance, whether this is regular practice of meditation, reading or anticipating potential stress points and preparing themselves to face them. They also explained how keeping physically active by taking regular exercise and participating in active sports not only benefits the body, but also the mind. They were confident in the knowledge that all adults in the school were here to keep them safe and cared about them. They highlighted the need to talk about worries before they became too big, because there was always somebody to help. They described, clearly, a wide range of dangers associated with internet and device use, explaining what actions to take to avoid falling victim to online harm. They also confidently named the various components of a healthy diet and were seen, during the visit, to make healthy choices without being prompted.
- 3.17 Pupils are highly self-aware and composed learners. These qualities are nurtured from the earliest age, where Nursery children proudly demonstrated their independence whilst putting on their outdoor coats using their 'superhero' technique. Due to consistently excellent marking and feedback, pupils know what they need to do to improve further; they all agreed, in response to the questionnaire, that teachers know their subjects well and also know how to help them to learn. Scrutiny of work reveals effective colour-coded marking and self-editing, using 'green for growth and pink for proud'; pupils explained, confidently, how this has a positive impact on their learning, allowing them to see not only opportunities for improvement, but also providing a record of successful outcomes. Pupils are confident and resilient, understanding that making mistakes is part of learning. This was evidenced when a group of Year 6 pupils explored personification, matching human qualities with nouns. After some initial feedback, pupils revisited and revised their answers, which were consequently much improved. Others described taking a spelling assessment four times in their determination to achieve a top score.
- 3.18 As they progress through the school, pupils develop an excellent ability to make appropriate decisions which have an impact on their own lives and those of others. Reception children showed that they

were able to make independent choices and were more than happy to explain why they had done so. In discussions, pupils described how making an active choice to complete homework tasks at the right time meant that they could enjoy other activities, such as watching world cup matches. Others described how choosing to spend extra time rehearsing lines for a school production, instead of playing outside at break, had resulted in raising their performance level and confidence. All pupils agreed that their teachers are supportive. Pupils are able to make these choices effectively because gentle guidance from staff combines with a sense of discipline and duty to ensure that important tasks are completed to the highest standard.

- 3.19 Pupils have highly developed tolerances for diversity and appreciate their place in a school community where diversity is celebrated. They are thoughtful, show excellent respect and value diversity in their community and the wider world. As they explained during discussions, someone's appearance, ability or disability and belief make no difference to their qualities as a person and that it would be very boring if everyone were the same. They described times when they had experienced difficult periods in their lives which resulted in them appearing or behaving differently to their usual selves, and how the support of their peers had been crucial to them triumphing over adversity. A palpable ethos of inclusion and acceptance for all has been successfully inculcated by leaders and the staff team. This was exemplified by initiatives such as a display in the pre-prep, entitled 'Different Families, Same Love', successfully promoting and celebrating diversity within the school community.
- 3.20 Pupils develop a good understanding of the values associated with non-material aspects of life as they progress through the school. In discussions, they highlighted the crucial roles that family and friendship play in their lives, explaining that without these, it would not be possible to function. They described taking time for reflection and stillness. They also showed their understanding of the need to keep the earth safe for next generations, describing their contributions to this through the work of the eco committee. They described considering imponderable questions, such as where we come from and why we are here, in subjects such as religious and philosophical studies (RPS). Others explained the strength that they draw from activities such as running and participating in drama productions. Pupils also strongly value and appreciate their school, with all agreeing that they would recommend it to a friend.
- 3.21 From an early age, children contribute positively to the lives of others. Younger pupils willingly take on roles as playground friends, helping the youngest children to play and organise themselves. Older pupils assist, ably, with duties in the dining room and others explained their role on the school's ecocommittee, which decides class commendation rewards every week for green action, such as turning off lights and recycling. Others spoke volubly about their representative roles on the school council, helping to promote positive change in the school community. The school's well-embedded buddy system successfully strengthens links between older pupils and younger children. During the inspection visit, pupils promoted carefully designed and manufactured items such as sewn gift bags, bookmarks, bee-rescue kits and dog toys which they had made to sell in the Christmas market in aid of a local bereavement charity. Representatives of Year 6 proudly showed a piece of artwork that was received in thanks from a local charity in response to previous fundraising. All Year 6 pupils volunteer as prefects on rota, helping younger pupils. House captains volunteer to help with organisation of house events or sports fixtures. The formal and extra-curricular have been well planned and implemented to ensure that a sense of service to others is thoroughly embedded, so that pupils actively exemplify the school motto, 'Non sibi', (Not for oneself).

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4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Kerry Lord Reporting inspector

Mrs Annette Nightingale Compliance team inspector (Senior teacher, IAPS school)

Mrs Emma Haworth Team inspector (Head, ISA school)