

St Thomas' Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132128
Local Authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	360371
Inspection dates	14–15 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Marian Thomas

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	114
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mrs Margaret Nowell
Date of previous school inspection	28 January 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 12 lessons taught by 12 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, members of the management committee, teaching staff, an educational welfare officer and the school leadership team. The inspection team observed the work of the pupil referral unit (PRU), and looked at teachers' planning for lessons, school leaders' development plans and samples of students' work. They also took into account the views of 21 parents and carers who returned questionnaires to the inspection team.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- The progress made by all groups of students.
- The attendance of different groups of students.
- The health, safety and welfare documents produced by the school.

Information about the school

St Thomas's PRU is on two sites with the majority of students receiving their education at the St Thomas's Centre. A smaller number of pupils receive their education in hospital and a group of older students attend a local further education college. The PRU caters for students who are unable to attend school because of short-term medical needs, identified mental health needs, exclusion from mainstream schools or who are pregnant teenagers or young mothers. Some students have a statement of special educational needs. There are eight looked after students. The majority of students are of White British heritage and approximately one third is of Asian or British Asian heritage. The number of students on roll fluctuates throughout the year and on a daily basis because the centre admits students who are on fixed term exclusions from mainstream schools.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

St Thomas's centre is an outstanding PRU which deserves its excellent reputation with parents, carers and the community. Parents' and carers' views are reflected well in the comment, 'My child is making excellent progress and grows in confidence every day.'

The headteacher and senior leaders have exceptionally high expectations of what students can achieve and deliver the quality of provision necessary for them to do so. The school is excellent at supporting students' unique needs and, as a result, barriers to learning are minimised and students achieve well. Since the last inspection, the school has made excellent progress in many areas. For example, the school has ensured that all teachers use assessment of students' work very effectively to set targets for learning. Through these and other improvements the PRU has shown that it has an excellent capacity to improve further.

Students who attend the PRU and the hospital teaching unit make very good progress in their personal development and grow in confidence as they move through school. This is as a result of excellent care, guidance and support. Students thoroughly enjoy school. Many contribute to decision making within the PRU in an informal capacity. However a more formal student voice has yet to be instigated through, for example, a school council. Most are clear about how to stay healthy. Their behaviour is outstanding and they feel very safe. Effective transition arrangements ensure students are well prepared for the next stage of their education. As a result the number of students not in education or employment after leaving the PRU is low. Attendance is broadly average and improves very well for many students when they join the PRU.

Good teaching is based on thorough and reliable assessment of students' learning needs and, as a result, all groups of students make equal progress. Behaviour is managed very effectively and teaching assistants provide excellent support in lessons. The outstanding and highly personalised curriculum has continued to improve since the last inspection, with new partnership initiatives to enrich learning. The care, guidance and support provided for students are outstanding and the welfare of learners is given the highest priority.

Senior managers are highly effective in moving the PRU forward as a result of excellent self-evaluation. The committed and supportive management committee visits school regularly and is effective in monitoring its work and holding senior leaders to account. Through its work with schools in the local community and abroad, the school has ensured pupils have a very clear understanding of life in a multi-ethnic society.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure students have a greater involvement in making decisions by developing a more formal structure such as a school council.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students joining the PRU often have significant gaps in their learning and, as a result, overall attainment on entry is below average. As they settle and respond positively to their individual learning programmes many make accelerated progress. As a result students achieve well in all areas of the curriculum. This was seen clearly in an outstanding humanities lesson where students were discussing the way in which European settlers moved on to Native American homelands. Skilful questioning by the teacher enabled students to build empathy and understand the issues faced by both groups and how historical barriers and attitudes are replicated in our modern world. Given the nature of the students' learning needs, this was impressive.

All groups of students, including those with behavioural needs and students who are looked after by the local authority, make good progress. This is because they engage well with learning because staff are particularly good at building up their self-esteem and, as a result, their belief in their own ability to succeed. They make good progress also because learning environments are well designed to meet the needs of all groups of students. For example, classrooms in all areas are bright, well decorated and carpeted, to provide a welcoming and safe environment. This, coupled with the wide-range of academic and vocational courses offered, ensures that students leave with an improving array of qualifications and accreditations. Last year's school leavers successfully passed examinations in art, English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology and physical education.

Students feel exceptionally safe because they know staff are supportive and help them at all times. Most students clearly enjoy their time at the PRU. As one commented, 'I enjoy it here because teachers respect us and we respect them.' Students recognise the importance of eating healthy meals and have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet. This is re-enforced well by time spent on the PRU's allotment growing food as part of an enterprise project. This is just one of the ways in which students successfully prepare for the next phase in their education or the world of work. Whilst students make a good contribution to the community both in and outside school by listening to and appreciating the needs of others, there is no system for their views to be considered more formally. The students say they would welcome an opportunity to take part in a school council. Students' excellent overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is seen in the way in which they react to each other and take care of the environment.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teachers use assessment information effectively to set achievable targets for all students. Students are aware of their targets and what they need to do to improve because, when teachers mark their work, they both encourage and inform them of how to progress. They are also particularly skilful at including in lessons all students, many of whom arrive in the classroom at short notice. Information and communication technology is used well to support students' learning and promote independence. Lesson planning is a strength and good attention is given to ensuring work is modified to meet the different needs of students. Support staff are highly trained and work very closely with teachers to support students' learning effectively.

The curriculum is exceptionally well organised and is highly personalised to meet the needs of learners. It is imaginatively enhanced by many visits and activities away from the classroom. For example, a recent visit to a Maize Maze helped develop students' independence and was used as the focus for an excellent lesson on developing students' understanding of risk. This experience was described by one student as, 'It was just the best trip ever.'

As a result of excellent care, guidance and support, students feel there is always someone who will listen and help. A careful and thorough assessment is undertaken when students arrive at the school, which is then used to target support effectively. Vulnerable students are exceptionally well supported and this is helped by the excellent links with many

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outside agencies. Transition arrangements are securely in place and students are well prepared for moving to the next phase in their education.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The perceptive and visionary leadership of the headteacher and senior leaders is moving the PRU forward exceptionally well and ensuring good and improving outcomes for students. This, coupled with excellent partnerships forged with outside agencies, is driving improvement further. The PRU's management committee has implemented good procedures to ensure the health and well-being of all students. The newly appointed chair of the committee, as well as individual members, offer a good level of support to the school and challenge to senior leaders. Procedures ensure all safeguarding requirements are met and that practice is of a good standard. The strength and quality of these procedures mean that any safeguarding issues are dealt with effectively by senior leaders. Leaders and managers have ensured that the school is a highly inclusive community. Systems to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination within school are excellent. The school works exceptionally hard and successfully to eliminate any gaps in the performance of different groups of students. Leaders have built successful links which benefit students and the local community and the PRU readily shares its expertise through partnerships with local schools. Links to the global community are well established, for example, links to a local mosque contribute to ensuring students are well prepared for life in a multi-ethnic society. The school is particularly successful at engaging parents and carers. The work of school staff ensures they are kept well informed about their child's successes. Exceptionally strong links with many parents and carers have been successfully forged through the work of the education social worker who is based at the PRU. As a result many parents are highly appreciative of the ongoing work of the PRU. The PRU ensures good outcomes for students, all of whom have significant needs. It does this on a well controlled budget and provides excellent value for money.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

The views of 21 parents and carers were expressed to the inspection team. For a PRU this represented a higher than average return. The PRU leadership team is successful in engaging parents and carers. The overwhelming majority of responses were positive, giving heartfelt praise to staff for the improvement in the engagement of their children with education. The inspection team agreed with these views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas' Centre to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 21 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 114 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	6	29	15	71	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	11	52	10	48	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	12	57	7	33	0	0	1	5
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	57	6	29	1	5	1	5
The teaching is good at this school	10	48	9	43	1	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	43	12	57	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	9	43	11	52	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	13	62	6	29	1	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	10	48	10	48	1	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	52	8	38	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	48	7	33	1	5	1	5
The school is led and managed effectively	12	57	8	38	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	71	3	14	0	0	1	5

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



Monday 18 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Thomas's Centre, Blackburn BB1 1NA

Thank you very much for making us so welcome when we visited your PRU. It was lovely to meet you all and to hear how much you enjoy coming to the PRU and how much it has helped you. We send a special 'thank you' to the six of you who gave up your time to talk to us so openly. These are the things we liked the most:

- the friendly welcome you all give to visitors
- the way in which staff care for you
- the way in which you all work hard and achieve a good range of qualifications
- the way in which you respect each other and the staff.

We feel that St Thomas' is an outstandingly good school and that you all make good progress. To make things even better and to give you a greater level of responsibility we have asked the staff to help you have a more formal system for expressing your views such as through a school council.

We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Marian Thomas

Lead inspector

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