

Thomasson Memorial School

Devonshire Road, Poynton, Bolton, BL1 4PJ

Inspection dates 31 October–1 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Pupils make outstanding gains in their social and communication skills and excellent progress in the acquisition of language skills.
- From their different starting points all groups of pupils make better than expected progress and some do exceptionally well. Progress in reading and mathematics is good and teachers ensure these skills are used in every lesson through pupils' preferred signing or oracy routes.
- Younger children make good progress in developing their social skills. Teachers check their small steps of learning effectively.
- Systems to check and improve the quality of teaching are rigorous and ensure consistently high quality teaching. Teachers are highly skilled and enthusiastic. Invaluable assistance is provided by support staff. Adults meet the differing needs of their pupils very effectively.
- Picture and sound links are used in every lesson to ensure all, including those who speak English as an additional language, achieve exceptionally well.
- Pupils very much enjoy school and are inquisitive and eager to learn. They are very proud of their school and say they feel safe because everyone looks after each other, adults are kind and they help them to understand their work. Parents agree.
- Behaviour is outstanding and contributes very well to pupils' learning and progress. Pupils work together and learn from each other's different faiths and heritages.
- Since the previous inspection, the highly effective headteacher has relished the challenge of bringing about change. With a new leadership team he has been highly successful in placing the school in a better position to meet the more complex needs of the pupils. Leaders compare the school's performance with local information. They have correctly identified the need to make comparisons with national information as an area requiring further development.
- Governors are insightful, ask challenging questions and are closely involved in helping the school to carry on improving.
- The outreach service is very highly regarded by the schools that it serves. An effective working partnership is in place with the local authority.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed nine lessons. Routines at the start of the day, playtime and lunchtime activities were observed and pupils provided further opinion and views as they led the tour of the school. In addition, inspectors listened to pupils read and discussed their work with them.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils, including the school council. Discussions with members of the school staff, including senior and middle managers, the school's audiologist, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority also took place.
- Inspectors took account of the eight responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and information from the school's most recent parent questionnaire. The views of schools supported by the sensory service outreach team were also considered.
- The school's work was observed and inspectors looked at information about pupils' progress, teaching and planning. Behaviour and attendance records were reviewed, together with the school's safeguarding documents.
- Visits were made to the main school and the on-site nursery class to observe lessons and to meet with staff.

Inspection team

Linda Clare, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Stephen Helm

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is at the heart of a multi-facility provision which caters for pupils with sensory impairment, primarily from Bolton but also from 11 local authorities in the north of England.
- Pupils may start main school at any time of the school year. All pupils attending the main school have a statement of special educational needs indicating hearing impairment and all have associated communication needs. Since the last inspection, a much higher proportion of pupils have entered the school with additional cognitive delay or deficit, physical or complex needs.
- The school also has a nursery class which provides morning or afternoon placements for younger children, both hearing and hearing impaired. Those with hearing move from the nursery to Reception classes in other primary schools.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is above average. Over half the pupils come from minority ethnic groups, mainly Pakistani or mixed heritage backgrounds. Just over one third of the pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The sensory service outreach teams are based on the school site and provide support for teachers in mainstream schools to help them meet the visual and hearing impairment needs of their pupils. The headteacher, as Head of Service, also manages a secondary school-based unit for students with hearing impairment and a primary school-based unit for pupils with visual impairment.
- The Thomasson Memorial School has Healthy School status and has achieved Artsmark, Sing Up Silver and Eco-Schools Silver Awards.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend further the work being undertaken to compare the performance of the school's pupils with that of similar pupils nationally.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Parents are very positive about the progress their children make. They appreciate the excellent and individual visual records which capture their children's learning and achievement very effectively through video clips and photographs.
- As a result of their hearing impairment and increasingly, their complex needs, pupils start school with skills that are lower than those expected for their age group nationally. From their individual levels, they make outstanding progress in their social and communication skills.
- Pupils enjoy their lessons and their eagerness to acquire language and vocabulary is very impressive. They work together collaboratively and are thoughtful in their consideration of others. Individuals' progress is checked very closely and pupils' targets for improvement challenge them to do their best at all times. Pupils know their targets and that they are reviewed each half-term to help them to learn more.
- The development of reading is given very high priority and pupils' reading records show strong progress. A range of schemes to help pupils build words and blend sounds support the very effective development of their reading skills. Pupils listened to by inspectors had a clear understanding of text, said they enjoyed reading and displayed confident, competent signing.
- Those attending the nursery make good progress. Staff help children to develop early language skills well. They sign and make clear connections between objects and words. Very effective teaching and activities that are well-matched to individual's interests motivate children to explore the well-resourced indoor and outdoor learning areas.
- The high 'look and say' content, across the school's particularly effective curriculum, is very well suited to those at an early stage of learning English. Consequently, these pupils make the same good progress as their classmates. Irrespective of their starting points, all groups of pupils make at least good and often better progress. Pupils with oral skills make faster progress and achieve higher levels than those who rely on signing. However, from their starting points, pupils who use signing to support language make outstanding progress in their use of lip reading and achieve exceptionally well. A significant number of pupils have cochlear implants to aid their hearing. Hearing assistive technology is used very effectively across the school and so no pupil is disadvantaged.
- Pupils' good and better progress, combined with the excellent development of their social and communication skills, ensure pupils are extremely well prepared for their mainstream or supported unit placements. They go there with confidence at the end of Year 6.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- The majority of lessons observed by inspectors were outstanding and clearly demonstrated the skill and expertise of teachers across the school.
- Teachers plan individual programmes with high expectations of what each pupil should be able to achieve. In the best lessons, the pace is brisk and so pupils learn quickly. Teachers quickly re-shape tasks or increase the challenge of the work if pupils are finding work too easy or too difficult.
- Teachers plan their lessons to ensure all pupils are given work that is just at the right level for them and all lessons include a focus on developing pupils' language. The words the teachers use in their lessons are carefully chosen to ensure pupils' understanding. Teachers make lessons fun and ensure activities hold pupils' interest with a focus on acting out, themed performances and step by step learning.
- The curriculum now provides more flexibility than at the time of the previous inspection and teachers ensure communication skills are part of every lesson. Teachers use questioning well and the excellent relationships between adults and pupils ensure that misconceptions are quickly and sensitively addressed.

- Excellent use is made of group work for pupils to share experiences and work at different levels of difficulty, but pupils are also encouraged to not rely too much on adults for help. No time is wasted and the balance between when the teacher talks and when pupils work by themselves is just right. In one lesson, for example, finger-spelling and the blending of letters were expertly combined by individual pupils who showed high levels of dexterity as they developed both communication skills and reading methods.
- In lessons, support staff play a key role in guiding pupils' learning. In the most successful lessons, they observe how well pupils respond to their work, noting specific points for further improvement. Teachers and support staff use signing very effectively.
- All teachers carefully mark pupils' work. Praise is used effectively and pupils are provided with useful comments on their work to help them to improve. Pupils are being increasingly involved in checking on their work.
- Parents are very positive about teaching at the school. Homework supports pupils' learning very well and enables parents to participate in their children's activities.
- Staff are supported efficiently by a fluent signer, a speech therapist and the school's audiologist who supports staff in their understanding of hearing assistive technology. . This additional support helps pupils to do extremely well in lessons.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils say they 'really enjoy coming to school' and their parents overwhelmingly agree. Behaviour in lessons is outstanding. Pupils' attitude to learning is exceptionally good and this helps them to make good gains in their learning.
- Pupils are very proud of their school and are always polite and well mannered. They look after one another and enjoy whole-school 'Team' working, such as the recent Olympic Day. These days strengthen their social and communication skills and encourage new friendships.
- Behaviour is equally good outside lessons. Pupils play companionably and their social development is outstanding. They meet visitors with ease and confidence.
- Sensitivity to others is fostered and pupils develop a keen sense of fair play. Opportunities to take responsibility and develop leadership skills have been significantly increased since the last inspection. From 'tidying up' activities in the nursery to roles as school council members, team leaders or monitors, pupils contribute to the school and effectively build their self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Pupils say they feel safe and know they can turn to staff for immediate support if needed and this makes them feel safe and secure in school. They are firm in stating that there is no bullying in school but are aware of how bullying may take place, including by text or phone.
- Good work and effort are rewarded by 'stars' and 'Pupil of the Week' awards. Pupils are very generous in their praise of others and readily congratulate them on their achievements.
- The school has had no exclusions since the last inspection, attendance is above average and the exceptionally few, very low-level incidents recorded indicate that the excellent behaviour observed during the inspection is seen regularly in school.
- The school enables all pupils to mix happily together regardless of background, and to appreciate and celebrate different cultures and religions. The school meets the needs of all its pupils extremely well and this is enhanced by its very effective outreach service, close links with the primary and secondary sensory units and with a wide range of medical, social and educational organisations.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher's highly successful and continual drive to improve standards, teaching and the curriculum reflects his dedication to improving pupils' education.

- Management of the school is efficient and very effective. The new leadership team have clear duties and responsibilities. Morale is very high and staff agree about what needs to be done to make the school even more successful. The school is welcoming and secure.
- The school has much better information about how well pupils are doing than at the time of the last inspection and uses this knowledge more successfully to help pupils to learn better. Pupils' progress is carefully checked. Ways to measure pupils' progress against other pupils nationally are being reviewed.
- Systems to check on the quality of teaching are rigorous. Inspection evidence supports the school's records of high quality teaching throughout the school. Teachers receive helpful advice on how to improve their lessons.
- Performance management is robust and the number of teachers who have progressed to the higher salary levels reflect the high quality of teaching observed. Training provided for teachers to help them continue to develop their skills is linked to performance management very effectively.
- The curriculum is another strength of the school. It is tailored very well to help all pupils achieve outstandingly well, especially the needs of those requiring a high visual and oral/aural input. The school ensures that music, drama and outdoor pursuits are fully included in pupils' learning.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. A wide range of activities beyond lessons and community activities, including a residential visit, meet the needs of all pupils. Ongoing links with the deaf community support the breadth of the curriculum and pupils' social and cultural development extremely well.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements and ensure that the particularly safety needs of pupils are met.
- The evident equality of opportunity helps to remove barriers to learning for pupils and the school tackles discrimination equally effectively. Its work with a wide range of professional agencies furthers this, enabling pupils for example to attend hearing clinics by having the sessions in school.
- The school has excellent communication with home and very positive relationships with parents. Information is effectively shared through home-school books and regular reports.
- The school has a flourishing partnership with the local authority. The school uses its expertise to the benefit of the local authority through the provision of its outreach service which is highly respected and valued by all.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors help shape the school's future and ask very challenging questions of the headteacher and senior staff. They are very well informed, share the school's vision and have a very clear understanding and excellent knowledge of school's strengths and areas for improvement. The termly Working Party days enable their greater involvement in school life. Governors hold leaders and managers to account very effectively and ensure the management of performance, including the quality of teaching, is addressed rigorously at all levels. They monitor finances well. The decision, supported by governors, to use the pupil premium funding to improve assessment has resulted this year in those supported by the funding at Key Stage 1 making better progress than those not eligible for it. Slightly lower levels were achieved at Key Stage 2.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	105276
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	402972

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	65
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Elphick
Headteacher	Bill Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	23 January 2008
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