

# Blackfriars School

Priory Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 2TF

**Inspection dates** 16–17 January 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
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.

- Leadership and management are exceptional. Leaders have successfully led the school through all the changes, strengthening teaching and learning extremely well through highly effective checking of performance and very well targeted training.
- All students whatever their ages or backgrounds make outstanding progress in all subjects, including English and mathematics, and in their personal development. This is because the teaching is outstanding and everyone is ambitious for students so that students achieve, and often exceed, their challenging targets.
- Teaching is so good because teachers and their teams work highly effectively together; teachers pitch the work at exactly the right level for students, building their confidence and their ability to work on their own.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding. They make excellent progress in their communication skills and the ways in which they work with others and manage their own behaviour. They feel extremely safe and are safe at school.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Sixth form students are extremely well supported towards the next steps in their lives and education. This is because of excellent teaching and the range of highly relevant qualifications and courses the school has developed for them.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural and their personal development are outstanding. A climate of mutual respect and celebration of each others' achievements and differences underpins everything the school does.
- Governors check up very well on the school's work and the difference that additional funding and measures to support students are making.
- The federation and extensive partnership links enable a rich array of additional experiences and courses to be available to students so that the school is able to provide impressively well for a very wide range of abilities and backgrounds.
- The very strong leadership within the school has secured rapid improvements since the last inspection and ensures that it continues to get even better.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 24 lessons, the majority of which were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team made short visits to other lessons, looked at students' work, discussed it with them and heard them read.
- The inspection team held meetings and discussions with parents, students, governors, local authority advisers, the school's senior leaders and other staff.
- Inspectors took account of five responses to Ofsted's on-line questionnaire, Parent View, other testimonies from parents, parents' responses to the school's own questionnaire survey and 74 questionnaires completed by staff.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents including: the data that the school keeps as to students' progress, the school's planning for improvement, the school's safeguarding documentation and evidence of its checks on its own performance.

## Inspection team

Susan Lewis, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Christine Fraser

Additional Inspector

Joseph Skivington

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Blackfriars is a large community special school, located on two sites, which has been subject to redesignation as a generic special school since its last inspection. It caters for students from 11 to 19 years of age on two sites six miles apart; 103 students aged between 11–16 are based at the Newcastle-under-Lyme site and 85 sixth form students are based at a site in Bucknall, Stoke-on-Trent.
- Although the school is within Staffordshire local authority, its students are also drawn from surrounding local authorities and in particular the majority in the sixth form are from Stoke-on-Trent.
- Students often enter the school part-way during their educational career. The majority who attend the school's sixth form did not attend the 11–16 provision, being drawn from other special schools in the area and sometimes mainstream schools.
- Five pupils, who are in Years 5 and 6, also attend the school and are taught alongside Year 7 students. These pupils were already attending the school at the time of its redesignation in 2011.
- All students have a statement of special educational need, usually for learning difficulties; many have multiple difficulties such as physical and medical needs; behavioural, emotional and social difficulties; sensory needs or autistic spectrum disorders.
- The very large majority of students are White British with very few from other ethnic backgrounds. A very high proportion of students are eligible for the pupil premium, which is special government funding to give extra support to students who are eligible for free school meals or are in local authority care.
- Since April 2009 the school has been part of a federation with another special school, The Coppice. The two schools share an executive headteacher and a governing body.
- The school does not offer any alternative education for its students.
- The school has numerous prestigious awards and in 2011 became a National Support School. Its executive headteacher is a National Leader in Education. The school provides an outreach support service to local schools for pupils with physical and medical needs.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the ways in which marking is linked to students' target and helps students to understand how well they are doing, what is good about their work and how they could improve it further.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students, including those in Key Stage 2 and in the sixth form, make exceptional progress in communication, English and mathematics because skills in these areas are very well taught through courses, and the lessons and courses are very well matched to their students' current levels of work and abilities.
- Whenever they enter the school or sixth form, students are very carefully assessed; challenging targets are set for them and their progress towards these regularly checked by teachers and the leadership team; careful grouping of students means work is very well targeted to help them meet these targets and make best use of teaching staff and other resources.
- Sharing of some specialist teachers, resources and facilities within the federation means expert teaching and enhanced resources are available for learners whatever the subject or the level of qualification they are taking. This has enhanced achievement, in both the secondary department and in sixth form, and the range of qualifications, subjects and options that are taken.
- Teachers give students constant verbal feedback as to how well they are doing and challenge them to achieve even more. This improves students' self confidence and gives them tremendous pride; they become increasingly independent in their learning and in their personal skills. Marking is used less systematically to help students to understand how well they are doing, however.
- An excellent emphasis on skills such as communication, literacy and numeracy means that students make rapid progress in these from the moment they enter the school or sixth form. Pupils' reading and writing skills improve considerably whilst they are at the school. Students have many practical opportunities to develop these skills which are very well supported in all subjects;
- The pupil premium has been used very well to improve targeted students' achievements. It is being used to fund additional staff for one-to-one and smaller group teaching in subjects such as mathematics for example. The funding is promoting accelerated progress very effectively. Consequently, students who are eligible for free school meals or who are in the care of the local authority achieve as well as others in the school and attain similar standards. The small number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds also make exceptionally good progress.
- The school is quick to identify any subject where students' progress is not quite so good. For example, the school changed its approach to teaching science following slightly slower progress by students last year in this subject compared to others and recruited an expert teacher. Progress has already accelerated.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their personal development are exceptional. A very strong personal, social, emotional and health education programme including units of work within a sixth form qualification enable students to develop a real empathy for others and appreciation of different lifestyles and cultures.
- The ways in which the school organises its teaching groups and the improved range of qualifications taught mean students are closing the gap between themselves and students nationally in subjects and in literacy and numeracy. All students achieved at least one qualification last year and many considerably more. A few take the higher level GCSEs or the

GCSE equivalent in subjects such as drama, art, mathematics and English, demonstrating remarkable maturity in their thinking whilst discussing their course work.

- Parents are very pleased with their children's progress. They comment on the 'excellent' progress their children have made in their academic work and personal skills, independence and attitudes to school, because of the 'high expectations' the school has for their child.
- Pupils who have the most complex special educational needs, such as autistic spectrum disorders and profound and multiple learning difficulties, achieve as well as others in the school, because of the expert individual support provided and the use of high quality technological support and sensory aids. These really engage students' interest and challenge them to be more active in their learning.
- Schools in receipt of outreach support report accelerated progress and improvements in the mobility and independence of their pupils, because of the expert advice they receive on teaching strategies and the use of technological aids and other resources.

### The quality of teaching

### is outstanding

- Teaching has remained outstanding overall, despite the more extensive needs of students and changes in staffing, because of the excellent ways in which the leadership team manage staff performance.
  - Teaching in the sixth form is outstanding. Staff are expert within their subjects and the sixth form draws very well on part and full-time staff and their partnerships with outside agencies and within the federation to ensure students in all subjects have access to high quality of teacher knowledge and skills. Teachers are highly skilled at engaging students practically so that they are involved from the moment the lesson starts and are excited by the new skills they are learning.
  - The learning opportunities in sixth form have been particularly well extended so that courses are highly relevant but with a good range of challenge, laying the foundations extremely well for students' next steps.
  - Teaching has an outstanding impact on the progress, achievement and confidence of students whatever their age, background and need, because staff are expert and have been very well trained so they are adept at working with the different groups within the school and sixth form. They tailor work very closely to the interests and abilities of each individual student so that work is set at just the right level for all.
  - High quality and imaginative teaching almost always engage students' interest and involvement very effectively, challenging them to think for themselves. This means almost all teachers get the best out of students including those who have the most complex needs.
  - Relationships between staff and students and students themselves are excellent. Hence, new students settle in quickly and little time for learning is lost. Students say 'everyone here believes in us and helps us' and so 'that makes us want to try'.
  - Excellent use of praise and verbal feedback is increasing students' self-confidence and aspirations and understanding of how they are doing in relation to their targets. Work in books is not always so systematically marked, however, and, in particular, does not always tell students what is good about what they have done and what they now need to think about to achieve
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even more.

- In the most effective lessons teachers' use of questions and of practical resources, including sensory resources, computer technology and communication aids help students to work things out for themselves and leave many opportunities for them to contribute. In a science lesson, for example, in the sixth form, students were visibly excited as teachers used music to signal the beginning of the lesson and excellent sensory aid and individual support allowed students to touch and explore and be involved throughout.
- Teaching assistants make very strong contributions to students' learning in lessons and particularly in small group and individual work. They have clear roles in larger group work, for example modelling answers or writing down their observations of students' behaviour or ensuring those students with more complex needs are kept fully involved even when they are not being talked to directly.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**

- Students and parents say that they love their school and it is 'brilliant'. They are proud to be part of it and of the improvements they have made in confidence and behaviour. Students are polite and respectful to their teachers, each other and to visitors.
- Excellent support through courses and through the school and sixth form pastoral and tutor systems promotes students' personal, social and emotional development extremely well. Those who have a history of behavioural needs on entry very quickly improve and learn to manage their behaviour because staff and students have such high expectations of each other and because clear messages are given about these expectations.
- Students have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and safe. They get on with each other extremely well and are adamant that bullying is very rare indeed. They have a very good understanding of what the different forms involve and what to do if it should ever happen.
- Parents agree that their children are kept very safe at the school and praise the ways it has helped their children to mature and take responsibility for their behaviour. The high attendance of students, particularly when their medical needs are taken into account demonstrates how happy they are to be at school.
- The behaviour of students in the sixth form is also outstanding. Students are noticeably supportive to each other, opening doors for those with wheelchairs, sharing resources and checking how others are feeling. They quickly settle down to work, are keen to improve and respond readily and with humour to their teachers' challenges to do even better. Students are proud to be moved to the Bucknall site, enjoying the 'college' atmosphere and responsibilities for organising themselves and being more independent. They particularly enjoy their contributions through the enterprise and charity work they do.

### **The leadership and management are outstanding**

- The exceptional vision of the executive headteacher, his leadership team in the school and sixth form and the governing body is shared by all staff and drives this school to constantly seek ways of improving its students' achievements even more.

- The outstanding leadership has successfully led the school through times of change so that it has maintained its outstanding status in all elements of its work but developed some aspects even further, such as the ways in which it collects and analyses its data and the range of learning experiences and qualifications available for students both in the school and the sixth form.
  - The leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding. Leaders check constantly on how well students are progressing towards their targets and relentlessly pursue excellence in teaching and in all aspects of provision.
  - The school works extremely hard to get the best out of everyone, including staff and pupils. Excellent staff training and management of teachers' performance have secured outstanding teaching and achievement. Any student whose progress slows is quickly identified and highly skilled support put into place to ensure no-one falls behind.
  - The school's excellent and extensive partnership links and federation status enable students, including those in the sixth form, to have access to highly relevant courses and options both on and off-site, including business and enterprise opportunities. These provide excellent real life opportunities to apply and use skills and work alongside others and enhance achievement further.
  - The local authority view the school as a 'light touch' school given its strengths and provide appropriate support and training for the leadership and governors, as well as overseeing its continued improvements. The school's outreach service is commissioned by the local authority. It is of very high quality and very highly regarded by the local authority, schools and families and is very well led and managed.
  - **The governance of the school:** Governors are hugely committed to Blackfriars and bring an extensive range of skills to the school and sixth form and these are very well deployed to ensure that the school both benefits from them in practical ways, such as health and safety audits, but is also held to account in as expert a way as possible. Governors are very clear as to their responsibilities and have an excellent understanding of the schools' strengths and next steps. They monitor carefully the impact of the use of pupil premium and how teaching is improved through the management of performance, including its relationship to pay progression. They hold the school leadership to account very well and are seeking to do this even more thoroughly through the newly formed pupil progress committee.
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## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	124510
<b>Local authority</b>	Staffordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	408918

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11-19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	188
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	85
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Dave Humphries
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jim Kane
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 March 2009
<b>Telephone number</b>	01782 297780
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