

St Thomas's Centre

Lambeth Street, Blackburn, Lancashire BB1 1NA

Inspection dates

19–20 June 2018

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Leaders at all levels, including the management committee, have been relentless in moving the school forward to become outstanding. The headteacher has been an inspirational figure during this process. Staff morale is extremely high.
- Teachers and support staff work together exceptionally well so that teaching meets the individual needs of each pupil. Staff use information they have on pupils' behaviour, emotional well-being and learning to great effect for planning purposes.
- The great majority of pupils in each of the key stages make good or better progress from low starting points, not only in English and mathematics but in other subjects too. The vast majority of leavers move on successfully to sustained further education, employment or training.
- The curriculum includes a broad range of subjects which capture pupils' interests well. Teachers track pupils' learning and progress in English and mathematics exceptionally well. However, the quality of teachers' recording of pupils' learning and progress in other subjects is less strong.
- The personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils are outstanding. Pupils are courteous and respectful. Their attitudes to learning are outstanding. Many pupils who had poor attendance records in their previous schools improve their attendance and punctuality, due to the interventions of staff.
- Senior and middle leaders have a shared vision for the school based upon the mantra: 'Everyone succeeds. No exceptions. No excuses.' Pupils share this sense of purpose. A number of pupils say that they 'feel part of a family'. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is strong.
- The management committee is very well informed about the work of the school. The school's systems for tracking pupils' progress enable members of the management committee to look in detail at the impact of the school's work. However, leaders do not analyse the learning and progress of the different pupil groups, including disadvantaged pupils, in sufficient depth. This limits the effectiveness of support plans.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teachers' assessment and recording of pupils' achievement in other subjects to match that in English, mathematics and science.
- Sharpen systems to check on pupils' progress by ensuring that:
 - leaders use existing pupil-level information already gathered to analyse the performance of different groups, including disadvantaged pupils
 - the management committee have access to this information so that members can check on the impact of agreed actions to improve the attendance, behaviour and learning of the different groups.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher and other leaders have been too modest in their self-assessment that the overall effectiveness of the school is good. Inspectors have compelling evidence to judge that the school is outstanding.
- The school is regarded as an invaluable asset by the local authority and neighbouring mainstream schools. This is because the headteacher and leaders at all levels are skilled in and passionate about supporting pupils with social, emotional or mental health needs. They work in full partnership with their mainstream colleagues to provide the best opportunities for vulnerable young people to remain in education and to fulfil their aspirations. As a result, this is an exemplary and outward-looking school with outstanding capacity to improve even more.
- There is a 'can-do' culture in the school. Staff at all levels agree with the school's values and beliefs about how to teach and support pupils who have been through difficult times. Pupils say that they feel valued and respected. They know that they can talk to staff and be listened to. As a result, pupils want to learn and they demonstrate outstanding attitudes in lessons.
- Leaders at all levels have received coaching in how to conduct lesson observations and provide effective and supportive feedback to colleagues. Teachers engage positively when discussing their classroom practices. They are willing and keen to share ideas and to develop professionally where there is a need. Outcomes of lesson observations are linked to staff appraisal objectives so that there is a constant emphasis upon high-quality teaching. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is excellent.
- Staff keep a track of how they develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in lessons and with what impact. Pupils learn how to socialise and be tolerant and respectful to others. They also learn about other cultures in a variety of contexts. There is a strong emphasis on helping others through charity work, for example supporting vulnerable children and young homeless people aged 16–24 years.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to support disadvantaged pupils in overcoming barriers to their learning. Leaders make regular checks on the progress pupils make and report to the management committee. However, leaders' focus on the progress of particular groups in this cohort lacks sharpness. The physical education (PE) and sport premium funding is used to good effect. For example, the school employs a sports coach who works alongside primary staff to provide weekly PE lessons for all pupils. This approach has helped staff to become more skilled and experienced in planning and leading lessons.
- Leaders have developed a clear curriculum rationale to meet the needs of all pupils from primary through to the end of secondary, under the banner of 'achievement for all'. They recognise the wide range of pupils' abilities and needs. As a result, 'pathways' are provided for each pupil that lead to accreditation from entry level awards up to higher-grade GCSE examinations. There is an emphasis on the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). These are supplemented by art and design, food technology, crafting and textiles, PE, personal,

health and social education, outdoor education and careers and enterprise lessons. Occasionally, pupils have the opportunity to take a GCSE in Urdu or Punjabi. The assessment and recording systems in other subjects are not as well developed or as refined as in the core subjects.

- The school emphasises the importance of emotional health and well-being through the curriculum. For example, there are regular visits for primary pupils to local stables, libraries and museums. For older pupils, there are Prince's Trust activities, extra-curricular sports and trips to the allotment. These opportunities promote pupils' confidence and self-esteem well.
- The highly effective leadership team means that the school requires only light-touch support from the local authority. The school works well with other stakeholders, including the local authority, to develop further the provision for pupils at risk of exclusion from their mainstream schools.

Governance of the school

- Governance is outstanding.
- The management committee comprises a range of experienced educational practitioners, currently in post or recently retired. They are passionate about the work of the school. The management committee is able to challenge and support leaders effectively due to their knowledge, skills, experience and backgrounds.
- The management committee has overseen and managed a number of improvements to how the school operates. It has recruited new staff and promoted the development of a new leadership team. These actions have resulted in a staff team that is equally passionate about developing the school's wider role in support of vulnerable pupils.
- Evaluative reports and presentations presented by a wide range of staff inform the management committee about the impact of the school's work. For example, recently, a teaching-support assistant reported on how working on the school's allotment benefited pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The headteacher's reports are succinct and provide useful information about the school's improvement, for example pupils' progress in learning, behaviour and attendance or the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This gives rise to a range of challenging questions when management committee members hold leaders to account.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Highly skilled staff and a named governor take overall responsibility for safeguarding.
- There is excellent communication within and outside the school, for example with other agencies. As a result, pupils surmount barriers such as poor attendance or emotional upsets to focus upon their learning in school.
- Pupils are supervised well and staff provide consistent care. Pupils are encouraged and trusted to keep themselves safe. They demonstrate this in lessons and in other contexts.

- There are strong procedures to ensure that pupils are safe when accessing information online from school computers.
- Staff are constantly aware of safeguarding. There is mutual trust between staff and pupils. Strong relationships with families ensure that matters of attendance, safety and emotional well-being are addressed at the earliest opportunity.
- Staff training in safeguarding, including the 'Prevent' duty, has led to them discussing safeguarding concerns each day at after-school briefings. They follow up concerns assiduously, often before concerns become serious.
- Leaders carry out robust pre-employment checks to reassure themselves that staff are suitable to work with children.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding because leaders work closely to support all staff. Leaders ensure that teachers adhere to agreed school policies, for example in the marking of and feedback on pupils' work. Teachers are enthusiastic and eager to develop their professional skills.
- The subject knowledge of specialist subject teachers is outstanding. As a result, their questioning and explanations enable pupils to grasp and understand new concepts without the fear of failure. This is evident across the age ranges. Inspectors confirmed that pupils' attitudes to, and engagement in, learning are exemplary.
- All classes are nurturing and welcoming. Staff celebrate pupils' work and efforts in displays, in line with the school's agreed policies. There are high expectations about behaviour and work presentation. Pupils understand that they will succeed because there are 'no exceptions, no excuses'.
- The quality of teaching support is outstanding. Teaching assistants work in close partnership with teacher colleagues to ensure that pupils develop the resilience to focus on their work and to learn. Staff make constant reference to assessment information on each pupil so that activities are always pitched appropriately to ensure that they offer suitable challenge. Consequently, the most able pupils can work at higher levels without wasting time on easy tasks. Conversely, lower-ability pupils have access to tasks which are pitched at their assessed reading levels so that they do not struggle unnecessarily.
- Staff promote the skills of reading, writing, spelling, grammar and mathematics across different subjects. For example, a visit by primary pupils to the seaside as part of a history topic led to some purposeful independent writing based upon their first-hand experiences. In science at key stage 4, specific terms relating to current work are explained and broken down by teachers to give pupils a greater understanding of new concepts. Mathematics skills are applied when pupils use calculation or measurement skills during science experiments.
- Teachers provide homework sensitively in accordance with pupils' social, emotional and mental-health needs. Some pupils are motivated to complete homework because they want to achieve at the highest levels.
- Parents and carers receive accurate information about their child's progress against the

targets that are set each half term. Those parents spoken to by inspectors value the excellent communication they have with staff about the progress their children are making.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- On arrival at the school, all pupils, accompanied by their parents, follow an induction programme conducted by the headteacher. The school's expectations about learning and behaviour are explained clearly so that pupils know beforehand how they need to behave in and out of class. They understand that the staff will do all in their power to help them succeed.
- Pupils' attitudes to their learning are outstanding. New arrivals adapt quickly to the calm atmosphere around school and in each classroom.
- Pupils not only concentrate on their work but are fully aware of the needs of other pupils. They provide support to their classmates during lessons and willingly take turns, for example when older pupils read out loud in class or during snack time in key stage 1.
- The school's curriculum is organised so that pupils' physical and emotional well-being is at the heart of lessons in the school and on educational visits. For example, there was a very successful visit to Brockholes (a wetland and woodland nature reserve), where pupils met Prince Harry in his role in support of people with mental-health problems. A display in the school shows pupils developing their independent living and survival skills in an outdoor environment.
- Pupils' timetables across the key stages include well-being lessons in PE, cookery and Prince's Trust activities. These sessions enable pupils to develop skills and habits relating to healthy living and which enhance their self-esteem.
- Pupils demonstrate their ability to stay safe, for example, during more unstructured times in the school day. Staff achieve a very good balance between direct and at-a-distance supervision. As a result, pupils, especially as they get older, take personal responsibility for their actions. Inspectors observed some pupils correcting others in their behaviour.
- Specific behaviours, for example relating to racist or homophobic bullying, are addressed and resolved quickly through staff-supported discussions. Personalised learning and behaviour programmes ensure that such incidents are kept to a minimum.
- Very few pupils attend alternative provision. Those who do mirror the attitudes and behaviour of their peers.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons, on the corridors, at breaktimes and lunchtimes is never less than good and is often impeccable. This applies across the key stages and on each

of the school's sites.

- Pupils' behaviour towards each other is outstanding. They are tolerant and show respect for one another, for example when playing playground games.
- Staff relationships with pupils are a great strength. A number of pupils say that they trust and respect the staff because staff spend time with them when teaching them or providing for their needs. As a result, pupils feel calm and able to concentrate in lessons.
- The school maintains meticulous records on behavioural incidents, including on fixed-term exclusions. As a result of leaders' actions, there has been a reduction in behavioural incidents over time.
- Most pupils who are referred to the school have deep-seated attendance problems. School leaders have worked relentlessly with families and other agencies to address these issues. Prior to joining the school, some pupils have been out of education for several months and even longer. However, through a range of strategies, including part-time timetables, home education and after-school provision, many pupils' lives have been transformed so that they have re-engaged with learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- The great majority of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, the most able and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, make good or better progress from their often low starting points in English, mathematics, science, ICT and other subjects of the curriculum.
- Many pupils, especially younger ones, return to their mainstream schools and pick up their studies successfully.
- There is a range of accreditation available to meet the needs of individual pupils, including the lower-ability and most able pupils. As a result, pupils who remain at the school until the end of Year 11 leave with up to five GCSEs. The most able pupils achieve at the higher levels, for example in English and art and design. Lower-ability pupils achieve a mix of accreditation, for example in entry level English and mathematics, BTEC National Diploma food technology or Prince's Trust crafting and textiles.
- The progress and attainment of pupils exceed those of similar schools nationally.
- Pupils are able to articulate their views and opinions about a given topic in a range of contexts. The most able pupils engage well in discussions about 'Macbeth' or when explaining their mathematical reasoning in lessons about geometry or algebra. Lower-ability pupils gain confidence in attempting new tasks in English and mathematics lessons because staff pitch the activities appropriately in line with recent assessment information.
- Reading is promoted very effectively and pupils respond well when given opportunities to read in turn in class or to an adult. They engage readily when asked to explain the meaning of words or phrases. Pupils complete follow-up research of unfamiliar words to improve their vocabulary. They understand the importance of reading and comprehension skills for independent living.

- Younger pupils develop good concentration skills when learning about phonics. They develop their independent reading, writing and spelling skills well so that they can then record their experiences after an educational visit.
- Workbooks viewed across each key stage show that teachers follow the school's agreed policy of setting learning targets from the assessment information gathered about each pupil. Pupils' progress towards their targets is monitored carefully, updated frequently and shared routinely with relevant staff. As a result, pupils know what they are learning and how well they are doing.
- Pupils receive exceptionally good careers information, advice and guidance. It was notable that a number of pupils were able to respond quickly and enthusiastically to questions about their future plans and aspirations. They are encouraged to build upon their strengths and talents, for example in art and design. The vast majority of pupils who leave the school move on successfully to sustained further education, employment or training placements.

School details

Unique reference number	132128
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	10046548

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 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	166
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Mr Brian Peacock
Headteacher	Mrs Joanne Siddle
Telephone number	01254 680523
Website	www.stthomasscentre.com
Email address	jsiddle@stthomas.blackburn.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 November 2013

Information about this school

- From 2015, the school was established as an all-through pupil referral unit that has one headteacher and one management committee. Previously, there was a primary and a secondary pupil referral unit with two separate headteachers and management committees.
- The school provides for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs, many of whom have been at risk of permanent exclusion from their mainstream schools.
- The school continues to provide for the needs of pregnant schoolgirls and for pupils with additional medical needs. A few pupils are placed for assessment for an education, health and care plan and may then be placed at a special school.
- The school makes use of one alternative provider, The Heights Free School.
- There is a higher-than-average proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Approximately 18% have a

Pakistani background.

- The headteacher is a local leader of education. The school's special educational needs coordinator is a specialist leader of education. They provide support in behaviour management and inclusion for local mainstream secondary and primary schools.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed lessons at each site, including the class based at Blackburn Royal Hospital. Some of these observations were completed jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteachers. Inspectors also looked at pupils' workbooks and spoke informally with pupils to assist in making judgements about their progress. They carried out an analysis of the workbooks and folders of different groups of pupils on the three sites.
- Inspectors spoke informally and formally with pupils about their views of the school, provision for their safety and well-being and the teaching and support they receive. Observations were made in different contexts of the school sites, including in the corridors and the playground and at lunchtimes.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders on the three sites, middle leaders, eight members of the management committee, including the chair, and two local authority representatives. Telephone calls were held with the school improvement partner and the head of children's services.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including the school's improvement plan and review of its strengths and weaknesses. Other documentation seen related to the school's assessment and target tracking system, attendance, behaviour, safeguarding, staff appraisal and checks made on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire. There were no free-text responses from parents. An inspector spoke with four parents at the school and took account of a recent survey of parental views conducted by the school.
- Inspectors took account of 39 responses to the staff online questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupils' online questionnaire.

Inspection team

Jon Ashley, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Linda Griffiths	Ofsted Inspector
Louise Corlett	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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