

Inspection of a good school: Thomasson Memorial School

Devonshire Road, Bolton, Lancashire BL1 4PJ

Inspection dates:

26 and 27 March 2024

Outcome

Thomasson Memorial School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils arrive at this school each day smiling and happy. They are greeted by staff, and their peers, into a welcoming community where they feel safe, accepted and valued.

Many pupils, including children in the early years, join the school with little or no means of communication with others. For them, the school's high expectations are transformative. The use of oral communication and sign-supported English is integral to the school's curriculum. The school ensures that the needs of all pupils, including two and three-year-olds, are identified and met. The expert help and support that pupils receive enables them to communicate their needs and access a broad and ambitious curriculum. Pupils achieve well from a wide range of different starting points.

Pupils behave in a patient, kind and respectful way towards each other. When they face challenges or frustrations, staff provide individual and targeted support so that pupils learn how to better regulate their own behaviour. Pupils engage well in their lessons. They enjoy learning without any disruptions.

Pupils benefit from the vast array of opportunities that the school provides for their wider development. For example, they take part in residential trips, access the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme and complete work experience placements. As a result, pupils develop their confidence and social skills so that they are better equipped to live successful and independent lives.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

In recent years, the school has completely overhauled and improved the curriculum for all pupils, including children in the early years. Pupils access a broad range of discrete subjects in line with the national curriculum. Also included in the curriculum, as part of the school's specialised core offer, are lessons in British sign language and deaf studies. This allows pupils to explore their own identity and deaf culture as an integral part of their daily learning. The curriculum offer enables most pupils to gain a breadth of knowledge.

This means that they can access an increasingly wide range of qualifications at key stage 4 that meet for their needs and interests.

Teachers are clear about the broad topics that pupils should learn in each subject. In many subject curriculums, the school has identified the essential knowledge that they want pupils to know. Careful thought has been given as to how this knowledge is ordered and how pupils' learning links to their wider development. However, in a small number of subjects the school is still pinpointing what pupils should learn. In these subjects, the assessment strategies used to check on pupils' learning are less effective. The gaps in pupils' knowledge are not identified and addressed well enough. Some pupils do not build on their prior learning as well as they should.

All staff have expertise and experience in teaching deaf pupils. They use this expertise well to adapt the delivery of the curriculum to meet pupils' special educational needs and or disabilities (SEND) well. The school uses a wide range of resources and approaches, including sign language, to prioritise communication and language for all pupils, including children and two-year-olds in the early years. This allows pupils to engage with the world around them, access the curriculum and make choices for themselves.

A phonics programme has been successfully introduced. The delivery of this programme is adapted to include the use of visual cues and sign-supported English for deaf children. Staff receive regular training and deliver these specialised lessons expertly. This enables pupils to read with increasing confidence and fluency.

The school environment is calm, friendly and purposeful. The school views all behaviours as a form of communication. It offers strong support to pupils and their families when needed, including help from external agencies, so that pupils behave well and contribute positively to their school community.

The school provides a comprehensive programme to support pupils' wider development. For example, pupils enjoy an extensive range of clubs and enrichment activities such as dance, jewellery making, sports, cookery and pottery. They spend therapy time with the school dog, Cookie. Pupils have swimming lessons and go on regular school trips and visits. This allows them to develop their social and emotional skills and to develop their interests and talents.

The school places a sharp emphasis on developing life skills and pupils' employability. All pupils receive specialist careers advice, support and guidance. They all progress into positive destinations of further education or training when they leave school.

Members of the governing body provide appropriate support and challenge to ensure that their ambitious vision for the school is realised. The school supports staff well so that they can manage their time and workload when making changes to the curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a small number of subjects, the school has not ensured that teachers are clear about the knowledge that it wants pupils to know and remember. This hinders some pupils from building up their knowledge securely over time. The school should ensure that it identifies the essential knowledge that pupils should be taught so that they deepen their subject specific knowledge.
- In a small number of subjects, assessment strategies are not used effectively enough to check how well pupils are learning the content of the curriculum. As a result, there are times when gaps in pupils' learning are not identified and addressed well enough. The school should ensure that teachers are suitably equipped to spot and then address gaps in pupils' learning.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2018.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium](#)

funding (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	105276
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10269166
Type of school	All-through special
School category	Maintained special
Age range of pupils	2 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	97
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Kath McArthur
Headteacher	Lisa Lane
Website	www.thomasson.bolton.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	6 and 7 March 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school provides education for deaf children aged from 2 to 16. The school also provides nurse provision for hearing children aged 3 to 4.
- The vast majority of pupils have an education and health care plan. In addition to being deaf, some pupils have additional needs such as moderate and severe learning difficulties, physical disabilities and autism.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The lead inspector met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into early reading and communication, mathematics and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum and visited a sample of lessons in other subjects.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free text comments.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted's staff survey. They met with a range of staff throughout the inspection to gather their views.
- There were no responses to the Ofsted's pupil survey. Inspectors met with a range of pupils from all year groups to gather their views about school life. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

Inspection team

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