



# Blackfriars School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 124510  
**LEA** Staffordshire  
**Inspection number** 281735  
**Inspection dates** 20 February 2006 to 20 February 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Alan Dobbins AI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special	<b>School address</b>	Priory Road
<b>School category</b>	Community special		Newcastle
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 19		Staffordshire ST5 2TF
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01782 297780
<b>Number on roll</b>	170	<b>Fax number</b>	01782 297784
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr Steve Cartwright
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	13 March 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Clive Lilley

<b>Age group</b> 2 to 19	<b>Inspection dates</b> 20 February 2006 - 20 February 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 281735
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This school for pupils with serious physical or medical conditions and, increasingly, for pupils with complex learning difficulties is larger than most similar schools. It provides specialist provision for the county of Staffordshire and the adjacent unitary authority of Stoke on Trent. All pupils have statements of special educational needs or are being assessed for a statement. Almost all are from White British backgrounds. The school has two sites. Pupils in the Foundation Stage and those up to Year 11 are taught at the Newcastle under Lyme site. Students in Years 12 and 13 are taught at the Bucknall site, which is six miles away. Since the last inspection, the school has gained a number of awards, including the Beacon and Leading Edge awards, and, jointly with a local secondary college, has gained specialist technology status. Outreach provision helps support pupils with learning difficulties in many mainstream schools in the region. Through a franchise arrangement, students aged 19 to 21 years from Stoke College are taught full-time by school staff at the Bucknall site.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 1**

Blackfriars is an outstanding school that provides excellent value for money. Given the outstanding progress that pupils make, the value added to their achievements by the school and the number of prestigious national awards gained since the last inspection, the leadership is too modest in judging the school's effectiveness as good. The leaders and managers are outstanding in most respects. Senior leaders create an environment where staff and pupils are able to achieve their best. Pupils are safe and happy at school and are cared for and supported outstandingly well. Across the school, pupils make outstanding progress because the teaching is outstanding. The curriculum meets all national expectations for learning, fully meets pupils' additional needs and provides opportunities beyond those seen in most equivalent schools. The progress made since the last inspection has been outstanding, especially in enabling staff to meet the needs of a greater number of pupils with complex learning difficulties. The procedures for self-evaluation are robust, although not always well linked to the outcomes of the broad range of initiatives that take place. The capacity for improvement is outstanding.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Continue implementing the cycle of self-evaluation leading to the identification and realisation of the priorities for development as shown in the school plan.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

Across the school, pupils make outstanding progress in their learning. The Year 11 pupils who left at the end of each of the last two years easily exceeded the scores predicted for them from their Year 6 SATs results, reflecting the benefits of the school gaining specialist technology status. The value the school added to their progress was great enough to place it among the top 5% of all schools nationally. All pupils, irrespective of the cause or severity of their learning difficulties, or the difficulties they have in communicating, do equally well against the targets identified in their statements of special educational needs, and those for learning in the subjects.

From the Foundation Stage onwards, pupils are prepared outstandingly well for the next stage of their education. So much so that at the end of Year 11, the most capable pupils achieve creditable passes on a good number of GCSE subjects, some in preparation for a university place. Those whose learning difficulties impose greater constraints on what they are able to do gain units of the Assessment and Qualifications Authority (AQA) and (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) ASDAN awards. As a result of the skills and expertise of staff in using assistive and augmentative communication strategies, pupils with the most complex difficulties make outstanding progress in communicating and towards becoming as independent as possible by the time they leave school. Students aged 19 to 21 years, who attend as part of the franchise agreement, are making an outstanding start. This is especially

noteworthy given the limited experience of staff in dealing with young people of this age range and the transient nature of the funding structure.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They approach staff to 'speak' on any matter as a result of the excellent relationships. The annual residential visits, especially to countries in Europe, provide powerful first-hand experiences of life in other cultures. Taking part in the thriving school council gives pupils excellent experiences of democracy at work.

Pupils enjoy coming to school very much and attend regularly because they are happy and know that they are progressing in their learning and in becoming more independent. As a result, they have excellent attitudes to school and behave extremely well in lessons and throughout the day. They are friendly, polite and are superb ambassadors when they meet visitors in the cyber café or shop, when they visit local facilities, or when they take part in the residential trips. All at school show respect for each other. As one pupil commented, 'We are all equal here'.

Pupils are successfully encouraged to make healthy choices, for example through the 'Healthy Tuck Shop' project. They experience fun and enjoyment from taking part in a very wide range of physical activities; in lessons in physical education, as part of their physiotherapy or conductive education programmes, in the basketball and football lunchtime clubs, and when they work through their own fitness programme, as the older pupils are expected to do weekly. The cyber café and shop provide exemplary opportunities for pupils to gain knowledge and to practise the skills important in ensuring their economic well-being.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 1**

Teaching and learning are outstanding. In each class, the range of pupils' learning needs and their capabilities is very wide but teachers' detailed planning addresses this very effectively because it is informed by a precise knowledge of what pupils can do and how each individual learns best. The pupils make excellent progress because they have individual targets for each subject and new learning is squarely based on what has gone before. Teachers with specialist knowledge of their subjects use innovative approaches to enthuse and stimulate pupils to do their best, such as using interactive whiteboards to very good effect to present the objectives for learning and to simulate outcomes quickly and easily. In one lesson leading to the Computer Literacy And Information Technology (CLAIT) award, pupils were excited by a demonstration of the way music and video clips could be added to PowerPoint presentations. Consequently, they worked very effectively and very enjoyably produced professional quality presentations on their chosen topics.

The improved use by staff of assistive and augmentative communication strategies since the last inspection means that pupils, including those with serious difficulties in communicating, gain unrestricted access to all lesson tasks. Sometimes, this may involve the use of electronic switches or speech machines, or the use of sign, symbols or exchanging pictures. Staff have become so expert at 'talking' to pupils that they change from using one strategy to another instinctively.

Teaching assistants provide considerable support to the teachers and make a significant contribution to pupils' progress. They are better trained than is the case in many similar schools and this shows when they work with individual pupils or small groups.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 1**

The curriculum is outstanding. It meets all relevant national curriculum requirements and provides older pupils with ample opportunities to demonstrate the full extent of their learning over a wide range of accredited awards, from the GCSE to AQA units. Very good use of high quality specialist resources, such as the multi-sensory room, the sports hall, the swimming pools and the fitness and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) suites, ensures that the curriculum matches pupils' learning and their additional needs. From the Foundation Stage onwards, pupils are prepared very well for the next stage of their education. The curriculum for students in Years 12 and 13 is very effectively tailored to meet their individual needs and prepares them very well for their future lives.

Promoting personal and social skills is a major focus and is achieved outstandingly well. Lessons in personal, social, health and citizenship education are supported by circle time and individual tutorials. Lunch time clubs, the very successful youth club that many pupils regularly attend with their brothers and sisters, and the shop and cyber café provide powerful opportunities to practise the skills of independence and to mix socially. The residential visits that pupils make at least once each year to places in France, Belgium and Holland, and to activity centres in Wales, support learning very well. Pupils speak of the enormous value the visits have in giving them 'the confidence to travel and to try new things'. The conductive education programme provides valuable additional provision for some pupils.

Whenever possible, pupils are prepared for full-time placement in mainstream settings. Every pupil has planned links with mainstream pupils, which range from mixing with those pupils who visit Blackfriars to watch a performance or take part in workshops, to visiting mainstream schools for social occasions or to take lessons in preparation for re-integration. Each year about 15% of pupils return full-time to mainstream settings. The considerable commitment to inclusion was recently recognised by the award of the Inclusion Quality Mark.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Child protection and health and safety procedures are clear and understood by staff. Risk assessments for lessons and visits are detailed and precise. Staff are very well trained in all the aspects of caring for pupils and they ensure that the pupils' dignity is preserved at all times. For example, in a lesson in yoga in which pupils practised relaxing before they stretched and flexed their muscles, the teacher and teaching assistants expertly lifted them from their chairs onto mats on the floor so gently and with great care and respect that pupils felt comfortable and confident at all times. Parents are confident that their children are safe and secure at school. One parent commented that 'the school is like a ray of sunshine'.

Statutory requirements relating to statements of special educational needs are fully met. Individual targets for learning in the subjects are very effective in guiding the pupils. Pupils' additional needs are expertly met through the support of specialist personnel, such as the school's nurse, the physiotherapist and the occupational and speech therapists. The strong link with the Connexions service means that pupils have a clear idea of what is available to them after they leave school.

All staff, including lunchtime supervisors, have been trained in strategies which ensure that the needs of all pupils, including the increasing number who have serious difficulties in communicating, are met throughout the whole day.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 1

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and management. His distributive style of leadership is very much liked by staff, who routinely achieve high standards in their work. Senior leaders join with him in making an outstanding team that shares his vision of excellence for all the school's work. As a consequence, the school is calm and very well organised and is a place where pupils are able to fully express themselves as learners and young people. The capacity for continued improvement is outstanding.

Although the money from the local authority's formula funding is less per pupil than is the case for those in many similar schools, the range and quality of the pupils' experiences are not compromised. This is because the headteacher acquires and allocates additional funds wisely. For example, this is achieved through funding linked to the specialist technology status and to the Leading Edge award, to the innovative franchise arrangement with Stoke College, and to the outreach programme, which is very well regarded by mainstream staff.

Leaders and managers know the school well and, in judging its efficiency, recognise the importance of Department for Education and Skills (DfES) value-added measures for pupils across the secondary years. They are less secure in judging how good is the provision for other pupils whose progress needs to be assessed against P levels, especially when they are of secondary age, or in judging the impact of initiatives, for

example the improved use of assistive and augmentative communication strategies, on the pupils' progress.

Governance is outstanding because governors take a full part in leading and developing the school. Collectively, they form a committed and confident ally for the headteacher. They fully expect to be kept informed of the quality of all parts of the school.



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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	1	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	1	NA
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	1	NA
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1	NA

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

We very much enjoyed our time with you and would like to thank you for talking with us and for helping us find out about your school. We now want to let you know what we think about your school.

We are very, very pleased with your school. We think that it is among the very best of schools because:

- You make outstanding progress in your learning and in growing up to be responsible and independent young people.
- You feel safe and are happy at school and you like the staff very much; and they like you and take great care of you.
- Your teachers and teaching assistants work very hard for you and they expect you to behave very well and do your best for them. You do so, in nearly all the lessons.
- You are delightful to be around and represent yourselves and your school very well when you speak with visitors, when you visit the local facilities and when you stay away with staff.
- Your headteacher and the senior teachers are outstanding because they create conditions in which you and the staff are always able to do your best.

Thank you again for helping to make our visit to your school so enjoyable.