

Thomasson Memorial School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105276
Local Authority	Bolton
Inspection number	308816
Inspection dates	23–24 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael McDowell

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 on roll	
School	89
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Elphick
Headteacher	Mr Bill Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2003
School address	Devonshire Road Bolton Lancashire BL1 4PJ
Telephone number	01204 333118
Fax number	01204 495675

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Thomasson Memorial is a school for deaf children who communicate either by signing or, through the use of cochlear implants and electronic hearing aids, by speech. It has a Nursery class for both hearing and deaf children. At the end of their time in the Nursery, hearing children move on to Reception classes in other schools. Because of their hearing and associated communication difficulties, the standards of most pupils entering the main school are below those expected for their age. They come from Bolton and neighbouring local authority areas. Most are White British but just under half are from British Pakistani, British Indian, Bangladeshi or British African families. For a minority of these pupils English is not the language principally spoken at home. There is a very small minority of pupils who are looked after by their local authority.

The school now administers the Bolton Sensory Impairment Service which provides teaching and training to support visually or hearing impaired young people in its area.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Thomasson Memorial School is outstandingly effective. It teaches its pupils to communicate clearly by speech or by sign with great success. This makes it possible for pupils to play a full part in lessons and in the lively social community of the school. They become confident learners and their achievement is outstanding. By the end of Year 6, standards are broadly average and pupils are very well equipped to move on. In many cases they are able to continue their education in mainstream schools.

Pupils thrive because teaching is excellent and very carefully matched to their individual needs. Teachers and teaching assistants have excellent knowledge of their pupils and engage them in lessons with great skill so that they really enjoy learning. The curriculum is exceptional, offering many opportunities for pupils to develop their personal and social qualities and to experience success. They respond extremely well and many give up their break times to take part in club activities which they really enjoy.

The pupils are particularly sociable. Their personal development and well-being are outstanding. They are genuinely concerned for one another and when necessary older pupils gently intervene to help young ones and show them the right thing to do. Pupils are encouraged to speak out on all matters that concern and interest them. There is a refreshing spontaneity in the way that they do this. However, there is no whole-school forum for pupils, such as a school council, through which their skills in group working, problem solving, leadership and economic understanding might be more sharply developed.

The school is exceptional in meeting the diverse needs of its pupils so well. All staff members are fully committed to providing them with excellent care, guidance and support. Pupils are kept well informed about their own progress and parents and carers are helped to be as fully involved as possible in their children's education. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and meet requirements. The care provided for vulnerable pupils, including those with complex medical needs, is first rate.

The outstanding provision made by the school and the very good results it achieves are due to excellent leadership and management that takes the well-being of pupils as its first concern. The school regularly reviews its performance and is generally accurate in its assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. The leadership is continually seeking to improve the school and develop its capacity to help deaf children. Parents regard it very highly and many say that the school has brought great benefit to the lives of their children and their family. Users of the service for sensory impaired children now rate it very highly. Governance is exceptionally good. Governors are able to offer pertinent advice and strong support to the school. The school has improved and developed its role very extensively since the last inspection and the leadership is well placed to continue this trend.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Most children who enter the Nursery class do not have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Their attainments on entry are broadly in line with of the expectations for children of similar age. A minority, however, are deaf. Their attainments, especially in communication language and literacy, are well below the expectations for their age. In the Nursery class, which is led by a trained teacher of the deaf, both signing and oral communication are used with all. Children

get off to a good start. They learn to communicate effectively, to be sociable and to explore their environment with confidence. At the end of their time in the Nursery, deaf children move to the Thomasson Reception class. It is during this time that the communication mode that is best for each child is decided. This assessment is done effectively. By the end of the Foundation Stage all children have made good progress from their starting points towards all of their early learning goals. Their progress is best in personal, social and emotional development and communication. However, children who rely on sign for communication find the mastery of early literacy skills particularly difficult. Children are very happy and eager to learn. The Foundation Stage is well managed. The curriculum is good at addressing the individual needs of each child. Arrangements to protect children and ensure their health and safety are robust.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide pupils with further opportunities to develop their leadership, group working, and problem-solving skills, as well as their economic understanding, for example, by starting a school council.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils in Years 1 to 6 make exceptional progress from their individual starting points. The majority of those who communicate orally come close to, or in a minority of cases exceed, the national benchmarks at Key Stage 2 in English, mathematics and science. Those who communicate by signing alone start from a much lower base. For these pupils reading and writing are tasks that are much harder to master. However, they too make remarkable gains. In almost all cases pupils meet the literacy and mathematics targets set for them in their individual education plans. There are no significant differences in achievement between girls and boys or of pupils from different minority ethnic groups. The significant minority who are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language also achieve outstandingly well. These pupils benefit particularly from the excellent signing that supports all spoken communication throughout the school day.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils understand the importance of good diet and regular exercise. They enjoy the chance to run and chase in the playground at break times and they are also keen on organised physical activities, games and sports. They take part in adventurous activities including climbing and canoeing and are particularly fond of swimming. They understand the importance of acting safely and this understanding is reflected in their behaviour, which is excellent. Pupils' moral development is remarkable. They are passionate about stamping out bullying but they say that they do not experience any bullying from children at their own school. They are not fearful about coming to school and their attendance is good. Pupils support the community of the school in many practical ways. They take on a variety of responsibilities and speak out on matters of importance to them. However, there is no school council where pupils could further refine key aspects of their very good personal development. Pupils' exceptional spiritual, cultural and social development shines through in many ways but it is chiefly expressed through their empathy with others and their care for one another.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is exemplary in its high level of expertise and its attention to the individual communication needs of pupils. All teachers are qualified to teach deaf pupils. They are creative and inventive in their planning. Lessons are fast-paced and challenging. They include a broad range of methods to ensure that pupils fully understand what is taught. Active learning is at the heart of many lessons because most pupils learn best not by hearing or seeing but by doing. Many active lessons are great fun. Pupils love donning costumes to act out familiar stories. It is clear that by doing this learners retain the sequence and vocabulary of the tale very well. Teachers and assistants have excellent relationships with their pupils. They are always at hand to guide and correct them when necessary and to show them what they must do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is very well matched to the broad range of pupils' capabilities and aspirations. Its outstanding strength is in the opportunities it provides for pupils to develop the mode of communication, either speech or signing, that is most suitable for them. It is precisely tailored to their needs. Excellent opportunities are also provided for pupils to make and enjoy music and the performing arts. They are encouraged to join in plays and performances of many kinds to boost their personal confidence and to improve their communication skills. They greatly enjoy these aspects of their schoolwork. The pleasure and pride that shines in the faces of the Signing Choir as they rehearse clearly testifies to this.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides its pupils with a safe and stimulating environment in which they can be confident of receiving all the help they need. From first joining the school in the Foundation Stage pupils' needs are thoroughly and expertly assessed. By the time they enter Key Stage 1 the communication mode that is best for them is known and a programme to develop their competence as either signers or users of speech is put in place. Pupils' development as communicators is very closely monitored as is their overall personal and academic development. Their parents or carers are kept fully informed about their progress. Challenging targets are set in individual education plans. Pupils are given excellent guidance and support to help them reach these. As a consequence, pupils make excellent academic progress and develop their personal qualities extremely well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Both the school and the sensory-impairment service are led extremely well. The headteacher has a clear view of how the school must further develop to continue to provide the best possible opportunities for sensory impaired children and their families. The senior managers and all staff members fully support his aspirations. The bringing together of the school and the sensory service with a single budget has made it possible to use resources in the most efficient way.

These are now used very effectively. The school has a very good reputation locally and, importantly, among teachers of the deaf. Consequently, it is able to ensure the exceptionally good quality of teaching and learning by retaining and recruiting highly qualified teachers. The school monitors pupils' progress very thoroughly and involves all staff and governors in reviewing overall performance. It has identified relevant priorities for improvement. It takes great care to keep its pupils safe and to ensure that they are not exposed to risk. The governors know the school's strengths and areas for development and bring very relevant experience and expertise.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Thomasson Memorial School, Bolton, BL1 4PJ

Thank you very much for being so friendly and helpful when I inspected your school.

I enjoyed being with you very much.

I must particularly thank those of you who took the time to talk to me. It made my job easier and really helped me to decide that your school is helping you to be as good as you can. One of you described your school as 'perfect'. I could easily see that you like it very much. All of you felt that your teachers were helpful. You knew lots about healthy eating and the importance of taking exercise. Swimming seemed to be something you all loved. You hate bullying and want to stamp it out. However, none of you felt afraid or threatened at Thomasson. When I asked about lessons you felt that they were not too easy or too hard.

After spending time in your school I am certain that it is outstanding. You work hard and achieve as much as you can. You are taught very well and given interesting things to do. The school takes excellent care of you and keeps you safe. You are developing into girls and boys who think of others, love to join in lots of activities and behave very well. You are eager to come to school whenever you can. Your school is led and managed extremely well.

In order to further improve your 'perfect' school I have asked your headteacher to let you get more involved in deciding what happens in school. When this is done you can practise being leaders, working together effectively and spending money wisely. In this way you can play an even greater part in making sure your school is always as good as it should be.

Thank you once again and good luck in the future.