

Blackfriars School

Inspection report - amended

Unique Reference Number	124510
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	328151
Inspection date	12 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Mike Kell

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	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	91
Sixth form	96
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Cartwright
Headteacher	Clive Lilley
Date of previous school inspection	20 February 2006
School address	Priory Road Newcastle under Lyme ST5 2TF
Telephone number	01782 297780
Fax number	01782 297784

Age group	5–19
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Amended Report Addendum

Report updated to resolve formatting inconsistency

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following:

- assessment procedures and the roles of teachers, subject leaders, other middle managers and senior leaders in measuring pupils' progress and evaluating their achievements
- leaders' analysis of the relative performance of different groups of pupils to ensure that none are underperforming
- the systems for monitoring and evaluating pupils' personal development and the use of data to provide interventions to meet pupils' individual needs
- the progress made by the highest attaining pupils and students.

Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, discussions with pupils, staff and governors, school documentation and assessment information. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspection found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Blackfriars is a large special school based on two sites approximately six miles apart. One site houses the post-16 department and the other is for pupils in Years 1 to 11. Following a recent local authority decision, the school no longer admits primary-aged pupils, although the 36 currently on roll will remain there. There are no children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and there are approximately equal numbers of boys and girls. A small number of pupils are in public care and a quarter of pupils are entitled to free school meals. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. In the majority of cases this is for physical disability, but significant numbers have moderate, severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils have associated emotional and/or behavioural difficulties too. The school has achieved many national and local awards. It is a specialist technology college and has national recognition as a vocational college. As a member of the Schools Enterprise Education Network it provides continuing professional development on enterprise education for staff in all Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent special schools. It is a lead school in the Leading Edge Partnership Programme aimed at promoting inclusive practice in mainstream schools, and it plays a key role in the local authority by providing outreach support to 127 schools, nurseries and child minders. It has a charter mark for information and communication technology, a Healthy School award, and is recognised as an Investor in People.

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 a very reflective and progressive school that provides an excellent quality of education. A very perceptive and knowledgeable senior leadership team and a well-informed and highly effective governing body lead the school with a clear sense of purpose. Consequently, it achieves great success in meeting its aim of transforming pupils' lives 'through collaboration, innovation, partnership and inclusion'. The school makes very good use of its specialist status through its excellent partnerships with other schools and local communities. Partnership with parents and carers features very highly too, and the overwhelming number show great support for the school and value the work that it does for their children. A parent summed up the school as follows: 'We feel our son is valued and that he has his needs fully met.' A pupil's spontaneous remark expressed the same sentiment in a much simpler way: 'I've been here 12 years. It's a brilliant school.'

The school's great strength lies in its ability to balance the promotion of pupils' personal development with stretching their intellectual capability. It does this so successfully because staff have an in-depth knowledge of all pupils' personal and learning needs. Consequently, staff maintain just the right levels of expectation and challenge while having in place the mechanisms to support the most vulnerable pupils and those with complex needs. Staff are ever mindful of the need to prepare pupils for leaving school and so by the time they do leave, pupils are as independent as they can be, equipped with communication and self-help skills as well as literacy and numeracy competence. The most capable pupils leave with an array of nationally recognised qualifications too. The school's specialist vocational status ensures that every pupil's ability in the 16 vocational competences that the school has identified has been carefully monitored. As a result, pupils are extremely well prepared for making the transition at the age of 16. In 2008, every school leaver went into education, employment or training.

Pupils make outstanding gains in their personal development. Their attitudes and behaviour are exemplary. They are friendly, sociable, courteous and polite young people. Pupils have a positive attitude towards everything with which they are presented and their enjoyment of school is evident throughout the day. Whether it is students trying on clothes from Shakespearean times or pupils shrieking with delight in the swimming pool, everyone gets a great deal of fun from learning. The pleasure that Blackfriars pupils get from being at school is evident in their attendance, which is excellent. Although the medical nature of some pupils' conditions disrupts their attendance, the overwhelming majority go to school as often as they possibly can. When in school, pupils become involved in anything and everything that is going on. They contribute greatly to the running of the school and are closely involved with the local community. For instance, pupils represent their classmates on the very active school council and older pupils become prefects or help other pupils with reading. Post-16 students run a community shop and cafe where they mentor local residents in developing computer skills.

Pupils' awareness of others and their understanding of the implications of living in a community are evident elsewhere too. They make excellent progress in all aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, pupils willingly help to move the wheelchairs of their classmates and they become increasingly adept at making choices based on an awareness of the consequences of such choices. The school's involvement with local residents and pupils' appreciation of the needs and rights of others reflect the school's outstanding promotion of community cohesion. The school's overriding culture is one of promoting equality of opportunity by removing barriers and embracing diversity. One parent summed this up very succinctly with

the following comment: 'Staff interact extremely well with the young people no matter what their disability.' The school knows the nature of its local communities very well and is very responsive to their needs, providing many opportunities for residents to use its facilities. Pupils also acquire an international dimension to their understanding of other communities and cultures through links with partner schools in Europe and America.

Pupils' excellent personal attributes put them in a very good position to make the most of very high quality teaching. Pupils' achievements are outstanding even though the severity of their learning needs means that standards are well below the national averages for these age groups. Pupils make very considerable progress in their work because lesson activities stimulate them to learn at an extremely rapid pace. Primarily, this is because the school has very effective procedures for guiding and supporting pupils' learning. Their attainments are measured carefully and staff use this information to set longer-term challenging individual learning targets. Meticulous lesson planning results in activities that present exactly the right level of challenge to encourage independent work. Pupils achieve their targets because they accelerate their learning by building on these graded activities lesson by lesson. Learning is further enhanced by teachers' very effective use of information and communication technology to capture pupils' attention, and teaching assistants' targeted support of individual pupils. The use of a variety of alternative communication systems ensures that all pupils participate and have the facility to respond and contribute through, for example, electronic aids. As a result, where learning is at its best, all pupils are enabled and encouraged to take part in lesson introductions, when targets are discussed, and closing sessions, when they consider and consolidate what they have learned. This very good practice takes place in the vast majority of lessons, but not all.

An excellently planned and organised curriculum generally meets learners' needs very well, and gives them a very wide range of learning experiences. Classes and groups are established according to need and ability, and specialists teach all subjects in the secondary department and some subjects to primary classes. As a result, the curriculum is very responsive to pupils' needs. Pupils follow accredited courses in Years 10 and 11, and although the range is relatively restricted, they achieve extremely well in these courses, with a very small number getting five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics. Pupils also achieve great success in acquiring accreditation in non-academic courses, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award and the Community Sports Leader Award. Community-based learning has an integral role in giving pupils opportunities to apply the personal skills that they have learned in the classroom in real-life situations. Residential experiences bring home the importance of living and working alongside others.

Blackfriars is a very safe and caring school. All risk assessment, safeguarding and child protection procedures are in place and staff apply them vigilantly. Bullying and racial incidents are very rare and the pupils confirm that if they do occur they are dealt with very quickly. Pupils have a very good general understanding of how to remain safe, and some show very good safety consciousness in specific areas, such as using wheelchairs proficiently. They confirm that they feel very confident about talking with an adult if they have concerns. Pupils' knowledge of how to stay healthy is equally impressive. They appreciate the importance of diet and exercise and very many participate in physical activity school clubs, such as football and dance. Individual pupils benefit from very high quality pastoral care and support. Through strong links with external agencies such as specialised therapists, staff develop a concerted and consistent approach to meeting pupils' personal needs. Feeding and toileting programmes are carried out sensitively and respectfully, maintaining pupils' dignity and privacy. Individual education plans

record detailed personal targets, which are monitored and adapted in response to pupils' progress towards achieving them.

Blackfriars continues to be such a very effective school because it is both responsive and ambitious. Leaders and governors have an acute understanding of the school's current status, a very clear perception of where they want it to be in the future, and the nature of planning required to enable the school to get there. Rigorous management systems maintain the school's smooth running and provide the vehicles for self-evaluation and continuing improvement. Data from self-audit are scrutinised very closely. For instance, by analysing assessment data leaders reassure themselves that no group of pupils is underperforming compared with other groups. Immediate action is taken if individual pupils appear not to be doing as well as they might, or a particular class or subject is not maintaining the highest possible standards. Very strong leadership and highly effective management mean that the school has an excellent capacity to develop further. For instance, the recent successful application for recognition as a specialist school for expressive arts rather than technology, with effect from September of this year, demonstrates the school's adaptability and willingness to evolve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Outstanding leadership and management are the driving forces behind a very flexible and creative post-16 department. The provision meets students' individual learning and personal needs exceptionally well because it is tailored around their ages and interests. The focus on vocational qualifications recognises the fact that most students will shortly be leaving full-time education. Students are very well prepared for this transfer as much of their learning takes place in real-life situations, such as the retail shop. Each student has a personalised package of support involving staff and outside agencies, such as Connexions, and this helps to smooth the transition. An expertly constructed curriculum and excellent teaching motivate students to work hard. As a result, they make very rapid progress in their learning and achieve extremely well despite standards remaining low. Students respond equally positively to staff's expectations of their behaviour and their ability to act maturely and independently. Students rise to these challenges and parents notice the changes: 'Since my daughter has attended college I have seen a positive change in her. She is happy, content and progressing well.' They make excellent progress in all aspects of their personal development. Their self-esteem flourishes as they experience success and as their knowledge of the world around them increases. This encourages their confidence and so they are very well placed to make informed decisions about maintaining a safe and healthy lifestyle.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the range of accredited courses and subjects for pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Ensure that all lessons reflect the best practice in the school, such as full consideration of pupils' targets and a review at the end of what has been learned.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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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	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

13 March 2009

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Blackfriars School, Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 2TF

It was a great pleasure to visit your school. My team really enjoyed the day that we spent with you. Thank you very much for making us feel welcome and for taking the time to talk with us.

You told us that you think Blackfriars is a really, really good school. We agree with you. Your school does an excellent job in helping you to become mature young people who leave school really well prepared for later life. You are polite and behave very well. You know a great deal about keeping safe and staying healthy. You obviously love being at school because you go as often as you can. We were very impressed by the school and college councils and by how well students work in the shop and cafe. Lessons in your school are excellent because teachers give you many interesting things to do. Therefore, you learn very quickly and make lots of progress in your work. You do very well in the examinations that you take. The staff take very good care of you. They work hard to make sure that you are always safe, comfortable and well looked after.

You said that your school is so good there is nothing about it that you want to change. The people who run your school do an excellent job but they want to make your school even better. They have lots of ideas about how they can do this and we have given them two more.

- Offer more examination subjects and courses.
- Make sure that every lesson begins with you looking at your targets and ends with you thinking about what you have learned.

I am sure that all of you want Blackfriars to remain an excellent school. You can help to make sure that this happens by continuing to go to school as much as you can and working hard while you are there. Thank you all once again and I wish all of you the best of luck in the future, especially if you are leaving school this year.

Yours sincerely

Mike Kell

Lead inspector