

St Thomas's Centre

Lambeth Street, Blackburn, Lancashire, BB1 1NA

Inspection dates

19–20 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Good teaching has been sustained since the previous inspection. As a result most pupils re-engage with education and achieve well in a range of GCSE subjects. Many progress to further education or training when they leave at the end of Year 11.
- Most pupils quickly settle at the school and those who attend regularly achieve well because the staff are sensitive to individual needs and make sure personal, social, emotional or medical needs are fully met.
- Parents praise the impact of the teaching on the good progress made by their children.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Pupils' behaviour improves because staff manage challenging behaviour very skilfully and sometimes behaviour is outstanding. Pupils feel very safe because of the care and support they receive.
- The new headteacher has quickly and accurately identified the centre's strengths and priorities for further improvement. Other leaders and staff provide strong support in the drive to achieve the best outcomes for pupils.
- The management committee has successfully taken on new responsibilities, such as budget management. They have maintained the previous strengths of the centre and now provide better support and challenge to leaders to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- The support of both the local authority and the management committee contributes effectively to the work of the school, its self-evaluation and its good overall effectiveness.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is good overall but there are some inconsistencies that detract from achieving outstanding teaching and achievement. This includes some lessons where activities are not as well matched to individual pupil needs as they could be.
- The low attendance of some pupils has a negative impact on their learning and personal development.
- Leaders do not routinely analyse the progress of the different groups of pupils to check that their performance is as good as it should be.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 18 lessons taught by 14 teachers and two higher level teaching assistants. Four lessons were joint observations with members of the school leadership team. In addition, the inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons and individual support sessions.
- Pupils were observed reading in lessons and support sessions.
- The inspectors held discussions with pupils, senior and middle leaders, teachers, support staff, the chair of the management committee and a representative from the local authority.
- Individual pupils talked to inspectors about their work during lessons as well as at break and lunchtime.
- The inspectors observed the school's practice and looked at a range of documentation, including the school's checks on how well it is doing and improvement planning. They also considered the school's data on pupils' progress, documents used by leaders to monitor and evaluate the school's work, management committee documentation and records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.
- There were not enough responses from parents on the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) to trigger an analysis. Consequently, the views from the school's own parental surveys were taken into account and the inspector met with six parents during the inspection.

Inspection team

Keith Massett, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Stephen Helm

Additional Inspector

John Ellwood

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Thomas's Centre PRU is located on two sites with the majority of pupils receiving their education at the St Thomas's Centre. A smaller number receive their education in hospital or at home. No pupils currently attend off-site or alternative provisions.
- The Centre caters for pupils who are unable to attend school because of short-term medical needs, identified mental health needs, permanent or fixed-term exclusion from mainstream schools, or who are pregnant teenagers or young mothers. Many have been persistent non-attenders at their previous schools.
- Some pupils have a statement of special educational needs. There are 11 looked-after pupils.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and approximately one fifth is of Asian or British Asian heritage.
- The number of pupils on roll fluctuates throughout the year and on a daily basis because the centre admits pupils who are on fixed-term exclusions from mainstream schools.
- Previously leaders designated all pupils as being eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding to support those known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after by the local authority. Taking account of this, additional funding was allocated to enable the school to provide extra support for all pupils throughout the year and all pupils receive free school meals. Pupil-premium funding has recently been allocated within the St. Thomas's Centre budget.
- A new headteacher has recently been appointed.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding and enables pupils to make outstanding progress by ensuring:
 - teachers plan learning tasks that are closely matched to individual pupil needs in all groups and classes
 - teachers have high expectations of pupils' academic achievement and frequently assess and re-shape learning activities during the lesson to ensure high levels of challenge
 - teachers provide clear oral and written feedback that guides next steps in learning towards their challenging targets.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - regularly and routinely evaluating all available information so that leaders, including the management committee, are better informed about the progress of individuals and groups of pupils and use this information to make strategic plans more precise
 - improving attendance, particularly of the persistent non-attenders who join the school in Key Stage 4, so that more pupils make rapid progress in their learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The school has sustained the good level of pupil achievement and progress since the previous inspection.
- For most pupils attainment on entry is well below their classmates in mainstream school and many have gaps in their learning and have been underachieving. This is frequently due to missed schooling, often because of exclusion, negative attitudes to school or medical conditions.
- All groups of pupils currently in school, including those with behavioural needs, young mothers and pupils who are looked after by the local authority, make good progress from their individual starting points.
- Pupils in Key Stage 3 and those who attend the hospital teaching or have been identified as vulnerable settle quickly and make rapid gains in their personal, social and emotional development, enabling many to fully re-engage with education and start to make up the ground that has been previously lost in their learning. One parent's comment reflected the view of many, 'St. Thomas's has had a massive impact and my son now enjoys to going to school.'
- Pupils in Key Stage 4 often join following extended absence from school or part way through their GCSE courses and some take longer to settle. Despite this almost all pupils leave at the end of Year 11 with GCSE passes in a range of subjects that include English, mathematics, science and information and communication technologies (ICT). Despite a slight dip last year, a higher proportion now leave having achieved a key measure of five GCSE grades at A*-G and more are achieving A*-C grades. This represents good achievement from their starting points.
- Pupils also develop skills and achieve a range of qualifications in areas such as art and design, physical education (PE), personal and social education, preparation for working life and cookery.
- Pupils told inspectors about their improved aspirations since attending the St. Thomas's Centre and many pupils successfully progress on to further education or training courses when they leave.
- Pupils' good progress was seen during lesson observations, examination of their books and in the wide range of high quality art work on display. Outstanding progress was observed in ICT and PE lessons. Sometimes, however, progress is not as strong when the work is not matched well enough to pupils' different needs.
- The progress made by pupils in English, mathematics, science and ICT are similar overall. This includes boys, girls, those with a statement of special educational need or looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for the pupil-premium funding.
- Good links with mainstream schools often enables continuation of work, such as completion of coursework, while pupils attend the hospital teaching. This practice supports good progress and helps their return to school. For others in the hospital school, who are sometimes primary aged and mostly attend for a very short time, work is more broadly matched to their needs and the quality of progress is difficult to establish.
- Pupils read regularly in lessons and those who need specific support make good progress.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching across the school promotes equal opportunities and good learning for all pupils in all subjects, whatever their ability or ethnicity. Teachers use the excellent learning environment well and ensure there are opportunities in all subjects for pupils to develop their key skills.
- Staff are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach and the pupils in their care. They develop trust and positive relationships with pupils that underpin the learning activities. Most pupils respect this and as a result try hard and behave well in lessons.
- Teachers work in highly effective partnership with the support staff to engage, enthuse and direct pupils to make correct choices. Occasionally there could be greater emphasis given to

supporting learning rather than managing behaviour.

- In the best lessons, teachers plan conscientiously and have high expectations for each individual's academic achievement. In such lessons, pupils are fully engaged because teachers have planned and adapted activities that are interesting and challenging for all. There is a lively pace throughout the lesson and pupils are supported but encouraged to work independently.
- In an ICT lesson pupils had clear guidance and individual target that allowed them to complete work at their own pace towards compiling independent coursework for their GCSE.
- In an English lesson, based on the poem 'Electricity comes to Cocoa Bottom' pupils responded well to the teacher's high expectations and worked independently, but with support, to identify and analyse imagery and atmosphere in the text. As a result some made excellent progress.
- In a PE lesson the pace, high expectations and precise guidance helped pupils to make clear progression in their skills. Being reminded that the school is currently the All England schools' boccia champions motivated the pupils who clearly enjoyed the lesson and all improved their boccia skills.
- Staff are highly skilled at engaging and motivating pupils and help them to overcome obstacles to learning. The climate for learning and attitudes of most pupils are good and pupils respond well to consistently applied behaviour management strategies.
- However, there are some inconsistencies in practice and in some lessons learning activities are not based on individual pupils' prior attainment so are not as closely matched to their needs as they could be. Opportunities are sometimes missed to assess pupils' learning and re-shape tasks during the lesson. In these lessons, pupils do not make as much progress as they could, especially the most able who sometimes find the work is too easy.
- Teachers' questioning and discussions with pupils are usually good but occasionally teachers do too much of the talking. Assessment of work is accurate and there is regular oral and written feedback. However, some teachers do not explain the current level of work being completed and written and oral feedback does not carefully explain the next steps pupils need to improve their learning.
- Discussions with parents and analysis of the school's questionnaires indicate that parents believe that teaching is good and this is borne out by inspection evidence.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- St. Thomas's provides a safe and purposeful learning environment where positive attitudes and good behaviour are expected. Staff are highly skilled in managing behaviour. They establish positive relationships and help pupils to identify and manage their own behavioural difficulties.
- The climate for learning is usually good. Pupil attitudes to work and school life generally improve markedly. Behaviour also improves because it is effectively managed. Parents say that behaviour is managed exceptionally well.
- Outstanding behaviour is evident in lessons where the expectations are clear, learning has a fast pace, pupils are challenged because the activities are interesting, well matched to the needs of each individual and the behaviour management strategies are consistently applied.
- Behaviour at lunchtime is calm and orderly. Most pupils enjoy eating the freshly cooked, healthy meals in their provision bases. Some pupils and parents expressed concerns that long periods are spent in these highly supervised provision areas with no opportunity for independent social activity or access to outdoor areas. Leaders are aware that these concerns are justified and are working to improve current arrangements.
- Staff know the pupils well and act quickly to deal with problems, often before they become serious. There have been no permanent exclusions and very few fixed-term exclusions.
- Incidents of bullying or those defined as racist are rare and effectively dealt with by staff. Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They told the inspector that there is very little bullying and that they know how to keep safe and learn about different types of bullying and about e-safety. Homophobic comments are dealt with appropriately.
- Rigorous safeguarding practices are in place and staff take the necessary steps to ensure pupils

are safe. The site is secure and recent changes to where different groups of pupils are taught within the building have added to their feeling safe.

- Appropriate strategies are in place to follow up non-attendance quickly and keep in contact with parents but overall attendance remains too low.
- Compared with their attendance records in their previous mainstream schools, attendance at St. Thomas's improves significantly. There are some who remain persistently absent despite the school's efforts. Although there are marked improvements over time for most pupils, non-attendance remains a significant barrier for a significant minority and is a particular concern for pupils who join the school during Key Stage 4.
- The school leaders are addressing this issue and have raised the importance of good attendance across the school. They are also in discussion with pupils who are persistently absent to check that the current curriculum arrangements meet their needs. Agreements are in place with local providers to ensure a greater range of vocational experiences for pupils. Parents confirmed the positive views of the pupils that the school has the highest regard for the safety of all pupils, including those with a statement of special educational need and those looked after by the local authority.

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher has quickly gained the confidence of staff, pupils and parents. Priorities are clear and changes to ensure a greater focus on improving teaching and outcomes for pupils are being implemented. Other leaders and staff are providing strong support for these priorities.
- In partnership with leadership team, the headteacher has maintained good teaching, good achievement and the very high levels of care and support for pupils during a period of significant change and re-organisation within the school. There is a good capacity for further improvement.
- Monitoring is accurate and leaders correctly identify strengths and priorities for improvement. There is a clear record of sustained high standards since the previous inspection.
- Current improvement plans are still developing. Leaders are starting to collect and analyse a broader range of information about individuals and groups that will better inform strategic planning at all levels across the school and enable leaders to check with greater precision the progress being made.
- Procedures to check the performance of teachers are in place and the link between the achievement of pupils and pay is explicit. There is a good programme of professional development and staff are mostly very positive about their personal development opportunities. The school is providing good leadership to improve teaching across the school.
- Leaders ensure good opportunity within the curriculum is underpinned by the principle that every pupil makes the maximum personal and academic progress. The curriculum also ensures there is a good provision for pupils' emotional development alongside good spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision.
- Good partnerships exist with external support agencies. Strong collaboration with local secondary schools has been strengthened by leaders' involvement in a wider range of strategic and operational groups.
- Parents speak highly of the range of activities offered by the school in meeting the needs of their children and helping them to support their child's learning.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The management committee effectively supports school leaders and provides a good level of challenge. The re-structured committee and the formation of sub-committees ensure they are better informed and well placed to fulfil their wider responsibilities. Members of the committee have worked closely with the local authority to recruit the new headteacher and have implemented changes to staff responsibilities. The committee is particularly engaged in supporting the headteacher's drive to achieve outstanding teaching and to improve outcomes for all pupils. They are generally well informed and check the school's achievements. Regular monitoring of identified groups, however, is not as well established and does not inform

strategic planning as well as it could. Members understand their financial management duties and the principle for using pupil-premium funding. Funding is used to enrich the curriculum and promote engagement and this contributes to the good outcomes for pupils. These activities make a major contribution to improving healthy lifestyles and to social and emotional well-being. Safeguarding and child protection are a high priority and all statutory requirements are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	132128
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	426275

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	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	104
Appropriate authority	The management committee
Chair	Brian Peacock
Headteacher	Jo Siddle
Date of previous school inspection	14 October 2010
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