

St Thomas's Centre

Address: Hawthorn Street, Blackburn, BB1 9TH

Unique reference number (URN): 132128

Inspection report: 9 September 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	●
Expected standard	● ● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- Not met: The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard

Inclusion

Strong standard 

Leaders have put thorough procedures in place to quickly identify pupils' needs. Staff use this information to help to build pupils' self-esteem and confidence. They adapt the curriculum to individualise it and ensure it matches pupils' needs. As a result, staff are effective in reducing significant barriers to pupils' education, including for those who have had social care involvement. Staff check pupils' emotional regulation on a daily basis to inform carefully structured support for their learning, mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Leaders identify and respond promptly to the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Where necessary, they secure education, health and care plans in recognition of pupils' needs. For some pupils, this successfully leads to appropriate places in specialist education.

Pupil premium funding is used effectively to meet pupils' individual needs, as well as to subsidise trips. Leaders' strategy aligns well with the school's improvement priorities and has a particular focus on speech and language. The funding also helps to provide pupils with accredited vocational options, such as construction, mechanics and digital music production.

Alternative provision is used sparingly and purposefully where appropriate. Leaders maintain robust quality assurance processes, including regular progress reviews and daily monitoring of attendance and safeguarding.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Leaders ensure that academic targets for pupils' achievement are broken down into small, manageable steps. As a result, the curriculum is designed to build a sustained sense of achievement for all pupils, regardless of their needs. Pupils generally make positive progress from their starting points across subjects.

Pupils in the school's primary provision achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics. They make clear progress in their work from their starting points. Some pupils gain GCSEs in English, mathematics and science alongside other option subjects. Where appropriate, pupils achieve entry-level qualifications in English and mathematics. Pupils also obtain a range of vocational qualifications. Disadvantaged pupils make gains in their learning that are similar to those of their peers. All pupils are increasingly well prepared for life beyond school. In recent years, all have moved on to some form of employment, education or training.

Pupils make substantial gains in their personal development, becoming more aware of their own emotions and actions. For the majority, their behaviour and attendance improve, enabling them to take pride in their achievements.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders have an effective and proactive approach towards improving attendance. They have brought about steady but notable improvements in pupils' attendance in recent years. However, despite their efforts, the persistent absence of some pupils in Year 10 and Year 11 remains high. Even so, the school successfully ensures that all Year 11 pupils move on to some form of education, employment or training when leaving school. Many pupils, especially those in the primary provision and key stage 3, make significant gains in their attendance and in their attitude towards learning during their time at the school.

Leaders have set high expectations for pupils' behaviour, and staff generally ensure that these expectations are met. Pupils feel safe from the harmful effects of bullying because incidents are rare. Leaders do not tolerate bullying, violence, harassment or abuse. The positive way in which staff engage with pupils ensures that such instances are rare.

Staff are provided with clear information about pupils' additional needs. The relationships that pupils have with staff ensure that they are generally positive about school and the wide range of opportunities that are open to them. Pupils appreciate the way in which staff cater for their needs. These adaptations are successful, particularly for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have carefully considered the design of the curriculum so that it includes transferable skills and knowledge to help pupils move back into mainstream education or other specialist provision. The curriculum is skilfully constructed to build on what pupils already know while addressing gaps in their prior learning.

In some subjects, there is a clear emphasis on securing the subject-specific knowledge that pupils need to remember. For example, in science, teachers focus strongly on developing pupils' scientific vocabulary. Although teachers generally ensure that pupils gain a secure foundation for their learning, some pupils are not supported well enough to apply their understanding of basic punctuation. Otherwise, pupils enjoy a wide and varied curriculum that provides them with a sense of achievement, including opportunities to develop skills for vocational qualifications.

In the primary provision, phonics is taught consistently well to ensure that pupils read with accuracy and confidence. Pupils also build well on their prior knowledge in mathematics and writing.

Staff question pupils effectively in lessons, helping to clarify misconceptions and deepen learning. They typically use their checks on pupils' progress to shape lessons so that they match pupils' next steps. These checks help staff adapt the delivery of the curriculum to

meet pupils' needs, including those who are disadvantaged, those known to social care and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders and governors have established a clear and compelling vision for the school's development. Recent changes to senior and middle leadership roles are driving improvements. For example, leaders have undertaken extensive work to ensure that the school's environment is more welcoming and purposeful. Leaders and governors know pupils' needs well and deploy staff strategically across sites so that these needs are met. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have prioritised actions effectively to secure positive change. For instance, they have brought greater consistency to the way pupils are supported to learn phonics, which is making a positive difference to pupils' reading ability. Leaders' decisions are consistently rooted in what will make the greatest difference to pupils.

Members of the management committee bring a strong range of relevant skills and experience to their roles. They know the school well and understand its context, which supports them in fulfilling their statutory duties. They challenge and support leaders appropriately to ensure that the school's provision for pupils continues to improve.

Staff are positive about the support they receive from leaders regarding workload and wellbeing. They value the professional development opportunities available to them. The programme of professional learning is strategically aligned to the school's development priorities, while also enabling individuals to extend their practice.

Leaders have strengthened their engagement with parents and carers to better support pupils and their families. This work has improved attendance for some pupils and has provided parents with a valuable source of guidance and support.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have ensured that there is a comprehensive programme for pupils' personal development that provides them with the knowledge and skills they need to be prepared for the next stage in their education, employment or training. The curriculum for all pupils, and especially those who have had adverse experiences, is structured to revisit key messages of safety and personal development at every opportunity. Leaders ensure that pupils understand how to maintain healthy friendships through an appropriate relationships, health and sex education curriculum. Pupils learn how to resist peer pressure and understand how their actions affect others. They understand how to keep themselves safe, including online. For example, pupils have learned about the risks and dangers associated with knife crime and gang culture.

Leaders have threaded aspects of personal development throughout the curriculum. Through their work in religious education and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, pupils learn to respect the opinions and values of others, including those of different faiths and cultures. With support from staff, pupils learn to cooperate and resolve differences in a more constructive manner. They understand what fundamental British values are and recognise the importance of treating people equally. However, at times,

some pupils struggle to recall some key knowledge from their PSHE work. As such, pupils do not have the same depth of understanding about these aspects of learning as they otherwise could.

There is well-structured and comprehensive careers guidance for pupils. Pupils in key stage 4 have thoughtfully designed work experience opportunities that help them develop essential skills such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving. Leaders ensure that there are opportunities for pupils to practise the social and practical skills that will prepare them for adult life.

Pupils are highly positive about the pastoral support they receive from staff regarding their moral understanding. All pupils are included in the wider development offer, including the exciting range of trips. Staff ensure that pupils make the most of these opportunities to engage with others within the community. These experiences, such as trips to art galleries, enhance pupils' appreciation of culture, as well as their own identity and heritage.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Many pupils arrive at the school having been permanently excluded from their previous setting or been at significant risk of exclusion. A large proportion have experienced periods of low attendance and present with a wide range of social, emotional and mental health needs. Some have become increasingly disengaged from education. However, once pupils begin working with staff at St Thomas's Centre, their experiences and outcomes improve. Pupils quickly establish positive relationships with caring staff. These relationships form the foundation of the school's success, enabling pupils to re-engage with learning, attend more than previously and begin to enjoy education again. Pupils benefit from a safe and supportive environment in which they can access a broad, dynamic and ambitious curriculum that prepares them well for their next steps in education, employment and training.

The curriculum is carefully tailored to pupils' individual needs and interests. Staff are skilled at identifying and addressing the barriers that have previously hindered pupils' learning. Consequently, pupils access a relevant, engaging and well-designed curriculum that meets their needs effectively. During their time at the school, pupils achieve well from their starting points. They gain appropriate and meaningful qualifications and develop a stronger understanding of their own behaviour and attitudes. This helps ensure that they are increasingly well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Pupils feel welcomed, valued and fully included in all aspects of school life. Any bullying is dealt with swiftly. Pupils benefit from a rich programme of trips, visitors and experiences that broaden their horizons and deepen their learning. For example, pupils have visited exhibitions featuring artists such as Van Gogh and Banksy, explored sculpture trails, sampled food from a range of cultures to develop social skills, and visited local colleges and universities to raise their aspirations for future careers.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that there are more consistent strategies to ensure that pupils can recall and apply key learning in some subjects, including punctuation and for some aspects of their personal development.
 - Leaders should continue to ensure that attendance improves, specifically for pupils in key stage 4 where persistent absence is high.
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About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This inspection took place on 9 and 10 September 2026.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers, the special educational needs coordinator, the chair of the management committee, representatives of Blackburn and Darwen local authority and virtual school, representatives of the 3 commissioning schools and a range of school staff and pupils during the inspection.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 11 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school currently makes use of one unregistered alternative provision.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection in the restructuring of senior leadership and management roles across the school.

At the time of the inspection, there were 113 pupils on roll.

The school has a short-term high needs unit that caters for a wide range of needs, including for a small number pupils with a high level of medical needs.

Headteacher: Angy Saaiman

Lead inspector:

Steve Bentham, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Lee Fazackerley, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This was the data available at the time of the full inspection, taken from [different sources](#). More recent data may have been published since the full inspection took place.

 The inspector(s) used this data during the full inspection on 9 September 2026

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2022 leavers (revised)	67%	93%	Not available
2021 leavers (revised)	65%	94%	Not available

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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