

Inspection of St Vincent's School - A Specialist School for Sensory Impairment and Other Needs

Yew Tree Lane, West Derby, Liverpool, Merseyside L12 9HN

Inspection dates: 23 and 26 April 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are welcomed to St Vincent's School with a warm smile and a friendly greeting. They benefit from a culture that celebrates their strengths and talents. This helps pupils to feel valued members of the school community.

Pupils enjoy caring and nurturing relationships with staff who know them well. They trust that there is always an adult available to help them if they are worried.

Pupils are respectful of others and behave well around the school. They are quick to offer help to each other, such as guiding their peers back to class. Staff respond swiftly and sensitively to pupils' emotional needs. Pupils feel happy and safe.

An impressive range of wider enrichment projects provide pupils with a strong sense of belief in themselves and a 'can-do' attitude. Pupils have opportunities to represent the school and to be positive role models for the visually impaired community locally, nationally and internationally.

This ambition, however, is not matched with the same high expectations of what the pupils should achieve academically. Many curriculum subjects are still in the early stages of development. This means that pupils are not as well prepared as they could be for their next steps in education.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

In a few subjects, the school has designed an effective curriculum across key stages. In these subjects, the school has thought carefully about what pupils should learn and when they should learn it. However, the curriculum is under-developed in several subjects from key stage 1 through to the end of key stage 4. In these subjects, the school has not decided exactly what pupils need to learn and when curriculum content should be taught. This hinders how well pupils achieve.

In the school's post-16 provision, students benefit from an effective curriculum. The school pays careful consideration to the qualifications that students need to gain in order to make a successful next step into adulthood.

In the subjects which are further developed, teachers deliver curriculum content well. They explain new ideas clearly and help pupils to remember important learning. They also design activities that capture the interests of pupils. However, this is not the case in the subjects where curriculum thinking is at an earlier stage of development.

The school identifies any additional special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), that pupils may have appropriately. This enables teachers to offer a range of support to help these pupils to access the same curriculum content and to build their self-esteem.

Many pupils arrive with gaps in their knowledge. An appropriate range of assessment information is gathered to identify these gaps. However, some staff do not use this information well to design learning which builds on what pupils know and can do. For these pupils, gaps remain in their knowledge and understanding.

Reading is a priority. Pupils who struggle to read benefit from revisiting early reading strategies including phonics. Reading books are well matched to pupils' abilities and are adapted to support those pupils who find it hard to see small print. Those pupils who learn braille benefit from strong support and a high level of expertise. Through patience and hard work, pupils become confident and accomplished braille readers. Staff seek to foster a love of reading among pupils and provide them with contemporary books in large print and braille.

Pupils behave well in lessons. They particularly appreciate how calm and orderly the school is. This, in turn, helps them feel settled and motivated to learn. The school prioritises pupils' high attendance. Many pupils attend school regularly. The school analyses individual pupils' absence thoroughly. Sensitive support is put in place to re-engage pupils and to get them back into school. Staff do all that they can to establish positive attendance habits in pupils.

The school offers pupils many high-quality opportunities to develop themselves personally and to prepare for adulthood. For example, all pupils have mobility training. Pupils gain the skills and confidence required to successfully manage social and physical situations that they may encounter in life beyond school. Pupils enjoy taking part in additional activities. These provide pupils with a wide range of opportunities to try out experiences such as yoga, debating, martial arts and karaoke.

The school is aspirational for the future of its pupils and seeks to remove the barriers that pupils with visual impairments may face in society. There is appropriate careers education, information, advice and guidance available to pupils and students. Where possible, this includes work experience opportunities and other practical experiences, which are all geared to develop pupils' self-reliance, resilience and independence skills.

Governors are committed to the school. They are passionate about supporting visually impaired pupils to make a positive contribution beyond school. However, the school, and governors, have not been sufficiently diligent in their monitoring and oversight of curriculum development. They have not made sure that the curriculum has kept pace with, and is equal to, the personal development opportunities on offer.

Staff value the support that they receive for their workload and well-being. For example, they appreciate the time they are given to fulfil their responsibilities. Staff are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In several subjects across key stages 1 to 4, the school has not given sufficient thought to the essential knowledge that pupils should learn and in what order they should learn it. Consequently, some pupils do not achieve as highly as they could in these subjects. The school should finalise its curriculum thinking so that teachers have enough information to shape their teaching and enable all pupils to achieve well.
- Some staff do not use assessment information well to design learning which builds on pupils' prior knowledge. This means that some pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding. The school should ensure that staff have the support and guidance required to determine appropriate, clear and manageable next steps for pupils.
- The school and governors do not have sufficient oversight of the quality of the curriculum in several subjects. As a result, in these subjects, pupils do not learn as well as they should. The school and governors should check that these curriculums are delivered consistently well so that pupils can build on their learning and achieve well across the curriculum.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	104734
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	10294197
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	11
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Bernadette Buckle
Principal	John Patterson
Website	www.stvin.com
Dates of previous inspection	31 January to 2 February 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Vincent’s School is a non-maintained residential special school for pupils and students with visual impairments and other sensory needs, such as autistic spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- At the time of this inspection, there were no children in early years or in Year 1.
- This Catholic school is part of the Archdiocese of Liverpool. The last section 48 inspection took place in November 2017. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place during the autumn term 2024.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

- The school does not use any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the second routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspection started on 23 April 2024. It was paused on the same date in line with: [Ofsted inspections and visits: deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofsted-inspections-and-visits-deferring-pausing-and-gathering-additional-evidence). Inspectors returned on 26 April 2024 to complete the inspection.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, including aspects of communication and language, English, mathematics, physical education including mobility, and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) including citizenship. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors spoke with some pupils about their learning. They also looked at the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about school life.
- Inspectors spoke with the principal, deputy principal and other leaders. They also spoke to the SEND coordinator and those responsible for careers advice and guidance.
- Inspectors held discussions with staff.
- The lead inspector spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. She also spoke to a representative of the local authority and the Archdiocese of Liverpool.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including documents relating to school improvement.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Sue Eastwood, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Tim Vaughan	His Majesty's Inspector
Julie Bather	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Hardman	His Majesty's Inspector
Andrew Cunningham	His Majesty's Inspector

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