

St Thomas's Community Network
Link 2 Learning
Little Saints Nursery
Kids United after-school care

Independent school standard inspection report

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Inspection dates	8–9 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Mark Mumby HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

The inspection of registered provision was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.^{3, 4}

Information about the school

Link 2 Learning provides education for boys and girls aged 11 to 16 years. It is part of the wider St Thomas's Community Network. It seeks to engage young people, who are experiencing educational and social problems, back into education. The centre is located in Dudley in the West Midlands and is funded by Dudley Local Authority and individual schools within the local authority that have contracts with Link 2 Learning. It was established in 2002 and is registered for 18 students. There are currently seventeen full-time and five part-time students on roll, none of whom has a statement of special educational needs. The centre was last inspected by Ofsted in March 2008.

St Thomas's Community Network also operates Little Saints Nursery and Kids United after-school care. The nursery is registered for 50 children aged from birth to five years. There are currently 47 children on roll, 18 of whom receive government funding. It was last inspected by Ofsted in October 2006. The after-school care is registered for thirty children and there are currently six children on roll who are in the Early Years Foundation Stage. It was last inspected by Ofsted in January 2011. Both of these provisions were inspected at the same time as Link 2 Learning and are reported on in the Early Years Foundation Stage section of this report.

Evaluation of the school

The centre is successful in meeting its aim of engaging young people back into education. The overall quality of education is satisfactory. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision is good. The centre has made notable improvements since the previous inspection. In particular, students' preparation for the world of work has been enhanced and effective strategies have been put in place to improve behaviour. Safeguarding procedures are robust and the centre meets all but one of the regulations.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

³ Schools which provide childcare for children from birth until the term in which they reach their third birthday must register this provision separately with Ofsted.

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/ukpga_20060021_en_4#pt3-ch2-pb4-l1g49

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory. The centre has prepared and implemented an overall plan to ensure coverage of the required curriculum and a suitable balance of time across different subject areas. This is supported by detailed schemes of work. There is an appropriately strong emphasis on developing basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Students are able to study for recognised qualifications including Youth Achievement Awards, Certificate of Personal Effectiveness and national qualifications at entry level 3 and level 1. Each student has their own individual learning plan to ensure that the curriculum meets their needs. The curriculum has been planned to incorporate some good cross-curricular links. For example, literacy sessions are used to develop students' cultural understanding through topics such as Black History. In this way students are able to develop their speaking and listening, reading and writing skills across different subject areas. Good links with other parts of St Thomas's Community Network provide opportunities for students to undertake vocational training in areas including hairdressing, music and horticulture.

The personal, social and health education programme prepares students well for living healthy and sociable lives. Cooking sessions contribute to developing students' life skills. These sessions culminate, each week, in a meal they prepare to eat with the staff, enabling students to practise their social skills. Support from a Connexions advisor, alongside an extensive programme of work experience, helps to prepare students well for worthwhile future careers. This work is complemented by lessons on employability in which students develop their skills to apply for jobs.

The centre is a Dudley Youth Achievement Foundation School. This partnership has contributed to the enrichment of the curriculum, such as through a range of visits including motivational days each Wednesday when students learn off-site. These days include cultural visits, such as to a local castle, a visit to a university and recreational activities such as bowling. The students also benefit from other activities within the wider St Thomas's Community Network. For example, during the inspection, students were able to attend an International Women's Day event which had been organised by the Asian Women's Network. A residential visit to North Wales provided an opportunity for some students to broaden their life experience.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory and students make satisfactory progress. Students have good attitudes in lessons and respond appropriately to the teachers' expectations. Behaviour is managed well. Lessons are clearly planned to engage the students in their learning and develop their basic skills, preparing them well for future education or work. Good opportunities for students to use ICT help to sustain their interest in lessons. However, assessment is not always used well enough to match work to the students' abilities. Consequently, work is frequently too difficult for the students to complete independently. Nevertheless, they make satisfactory progress in their learning because of the high levels of support they receive. In most lessons students receive one-to-one support for the majority of the time. However, this restricts the opportunities for the students to develop their independent learning

skills. Teachers are skilled at using praise to encourage and motivate the students. Teachers and other adults use questioning well to engage students in their learning, frequently targeting questions to specific students to ensure that they continue to concentrate. However, questioning is not always used as effectively to extend the students' learning by exploring their understanding more deeply. Some taught sessions, such as the awards afternoons, are very long. Learning often slows at these times because teachers' expectations of how much students could achieve are not high enough.

A range of national assessments and diagnostic tests are used to assess students' basic skills. These assessments provide a baseline when students join the centre and are then used to monitor progress as students work towards recognised qualifications. The centre is aware that the tracking of students' attainment and progress is at an early stage of development. It has plans in place to implement an electronic system to improve this.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The centre has successfully re-engaged the students in learning by providing an environment where the students feel valued and secure. They appreciate the more relaxed atmosphere compared to that which many of them experienced in previous settings. Students say that they enjoy attending Link 2 Learning. The centre has implemented, with mixed success, a range of strategies to improve attendance. Students have a good level of self-esteem and talk proudly about aspects of their work and their future aspirations. They relate well to adults and to each other, showing a good understanding of right and wrong. There is a good level of understanding between the students from different ethnic backgrounds. Students are respectful of the discipline and rules that the centre has put in place. They show courtesy to those around them, including members of the community visiting the site. They have good attitudes in lessons and their behaviour is good.

Students have a good understanding of the culturally diverse society in which they live. They are aware of the mixed views within the local community with regard to respecting other cultures. They demonstrate a good level of racial understanding. Aspects of the curriculum, such as Black History week, enrich their understanding of different cultures further.

The students' sound grounding in literacy, numeracy and ICT, good opportunities to develop personal skills and good careers development prepare students well for their future economic well-being. They make a good contribution to the centre and wider community. For example, two students presented their own artwork at the St Thomas's Community Network annual general meeting, and this was subsequently used on the front covers of the annual report and the prospectus for the network. Students have raised funds for a farm in Africa through a range of enterprising events.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. The centre is systematic in ensuring that procedures to ensure that students are healthy and safe are rigorous. Policies are reviewed regularly and provide clear guidance for staff and students. All of the required training has taken place with regard to child protection, first aid, and the safe recruitment of staff. Procedures for first aid and the recording of incidents are robust, although the first aid policy does not provide sufficient guidance with regard to dealing with spillages of bodily fluids or when an emergency ambulance should be called.

The health and safety policy is detailed and clear. The centre has prepared helpful guidance for the organisation of off-site visits. Risk assessments for activities both on and away from the centre's site are of good quality, demonstrating a rigorous approach to minimising risks to students. Routine checks of the fire alarm system, fire extinguishers and electrical items are all carried out appropriately.

The centre has taken effective action, including implementing clear rules and sanctions, to improve behaviour. The students say that there is no bullying in the centre and that they feel safe because the staff care for them well. Registers are completed in line with the requirements and the centre maintains an admissions register. However, the admissions register does not fully meet the requirements because it does not record details of the students' previous schools or include an alphabetical index.

Students have a good understanding about how to lead healthy lifestyles. The curriculum includes good opportunities to promote this aspect including visits from the school nurse. Weekly physical education lessons provide good opportunities for exercise and the students benefit from being able to go outdoors at breaktimes. The centre has imposed a zero-tolerance policy to smoking on the centre's site.

The centre has not prepared a three-year accessibility plan as required by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The centre carries out all of the required checks on staff and volunteers and maintains appropriate records.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The centre's premises are part of the wider St Thomas's Community Network. There are three dedicated teaching rooms for Link 2 Learning. The students also have use of specialist facilities including an ICT suite, sports hall and a hair and beauty salon for vocational learning. There is adequate outdoor space including occasional use of

an additional hard play area alongside the centre's site. Appropriate supervision and security arrangements are in place to ensure that the students are safe on this shared site.

Provision of information

The centre makes information available to parents and carers as required through its prospectus and website. Parents and carers are provided with two reports annually about the progress and attainment of their children. These reports meet requirements but do not always include targets for further development. Links with parents and carers are enhanced through regular telephone contact.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a clearly written complaints procedure which meets the requirements.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The needs of the babies and children in the nursery are well met and the overall effectiveness of the provision is good. This is the result of good leadership and management, and effective teamwork of the staff. The safety and welfare of the children are high priorities. Consequently, they are secure, happy, well-behaved and willing learners. The manager has identified many strengths in the nursery and knows what needs to be done to improve the provision for all the children. Good progress has been made on the recommendations in the last report. In particular, assessment and planning have been improved. The staff make regular observations of the babies and children's activities and compile good records of their progress and development. The next steps in learning are identified and staff are sensitive to children's individual interests. As a result, activities are more focused and help all of the children to make even better progress. Outcomes for children are good. There are good relationships with other agencies and other schools in the area.

Provision for children of all ages is good. There is a strong emphasis on developing children's language skills. Staff talk to the babies in a relaxed way. The babies make good eye-contact with adults and show that they are listening. They try to sing along to nursery rhymes when washing their hands and they learn about simple hygiene routines. Staff take every opportunity to reinforce children's counting skills and their recognition of the size and shape of objects. For example, at snack time in the toddlers' room, one child said, 'I want the great big massive one!' when the tomatoes were being shared. There is a good balance of adult-led activity and free-choice play giving children opportunities to engage in interesting activities where they can experiment, explore and be creative. The three- and four-year olds can choose to play in the well-resourced outside area or stay in the classroom to enjoy acting out a birthday party, for example, in the role-play area. Children enjoy playing

outside in all weathers and have every opportunity to develop their physical skills. They make very good progress in this area.

Relationships are good and the very caring staff make sure that all of the children are included in activities. Staff value the individuality of the children and praise them enthusiastically for their achievements. There are good systems in place to keep parents and carers informed about their children's learning and development. However, the nursery manager is aware that there are not enough opportunities to involve parents and carers more in the work of the nursery.

Kids United provides after-school care for children from local schools. The club makes satisfactory provision for the children. Satisfactory progress has been made on the actions and recommendations in the previous report. The children are safe and protected from harm. They enjoy coming to the club and have the opportunity to relax after the school day. Children of all ages can join in a range of suitable activities together and enjoy a healthy tea-time snack. The new manager knows the strengths and areas for development and is making plans to improve the club. In particular, she is beginning to introduce a system of rewards in order to improve behaviour and to develop children's personal and social skills.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils (standards in part 3) and must:

- maintain an admission register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 17).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, the centre should devise a three-year accessibility plan.⁵

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the centre might wish to consider the following points for development:

- make more effective use of assessment to match teaching to students' individual abilities
- strengthen the partnership with parents and carers of children in the nursery to support their children's learning and development
- implement effective strategies to improve the behaviour of the children attending the after-school care.

⁵ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/ukpga_19950050_en_1

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education			✓	
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils			✓	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs			✓	
How well pupils make progress in their learning			✓	

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage		✓		
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage		✓		
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage		✓		
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage		✓		

School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Secondary		
Date school opened	September 2002		
Age range of pupils	11–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 11	Girls: 6	Total: 17
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 4	Girls: 1	Total: 5
Number of children aged 0–3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 7	Girls: 11	Total: 18
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,825		
Annual fees (childcare)	Nursery £32.50 per day After-school care £10.50 per day		
Address of school	Bluecoat Base Beechwood Road Dudley DY2 7QA		
Telephone number	01384 818990		
Email address	Janet.hilken@dudley.gov.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Janet Hilken		
Proprietor	Cyril Woodall MBE (chair of trustees)		