

Inclusion Quality Mark Accreditation Report

St. Thomas's C.E. Primary School, Bury

Monday 16th March 2026

St. Thomas's C.E. Primary School was initially accredited with Bury's Inclusion Quality Mark in December 2019, and was then reaccredited in March 2023. On both occasions school was provided with feedback and a written report describing strengths and possible areas for development.

School has requested a second re-accreditation so that their current practice can be assessed against the Bury Inclusion Quality Mark standards. These standards are organised into four areas: Whole School Approaches; Inclusive Learning; Supporting Emotional Health and Wellbeing; Participation and Involvement. School's performance against the standards was assessed during a full day visit on 16th March 2026. The visit was conducted by Ian Sutcliffe (Primary SEND Support Lead) and Katie Hellon (SENCO and Assistant Headteacher from Woodbank Primary School).

Activities for the accreditation included:

- Extensive learning walks through school
- Interviews with Pupil Parliament, Power of Prayer group and Rights Respecting Schools group.
- Interviews with parents
- Interviews with the senior leadership team
- Interviews with teachers and teaching assistants
- Interviews with governors
- Examination and discussion of school plans
- Review of school policies and procedures
- Scrutiny of pupil work

Whole School Approaches

Ethos

- The school demonstrates a highly inclusive ethos, with careful consideration being made to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met through Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision (OAIP), alongside targeted intervention for pupils receiving SEN Support or with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
- Pupils at St. Thomas's present with a wide range of needs, and a high proportion speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). Staff work diligently to identify emerging needs at the earliest opportunity and ensure timely, appropriate support is in place.
- Pupils report feeling safe and happy in school and are involved in decision making processes through pupil parliament and other groups facilitated by staff.
- Discussions with school leaders and governors clearly evidenced a strong commitment to continuous improvement in inclusive practice and to ensuring that all pupils and families feel valued as part of the school community.
- Staff development is a high priority, with CPD, peer working and feedback being key to ensuring that all staff feel confident delivering effective OAIP.
- A high proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and many pupils do not have English as their first language. The school is situated in an area

that is classified as having high levels of deprivation (Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2019). Teachers and support staff talk passionately about needs of learners and how school strives to have high expectations for them and give every pupil the same opportunities.

- Parents overwhelmingly describe their child's and their own experience of school positively, describing school as a family. They all felt that school go 'above and beyond' to identify and meet the needs of their children. Several of them shared that St Thomas' was the only school prepared to offer their child a place, due to a high level of SEN, and how their children are thriving in the school.
- Teachers and teaching assistants spoke about their strong working relationships and the positive impact that this has on classroom learning.

Leadership and Governance

- Leadership is currently engaged in an audit and improvement journey of the OAIP offer in school. Leaders have carefully assessed school's current inclusive practice using the OAIP audit tool and used this data to inform the SEND action plan. As school is already involved in the 'Oracy 21' project, communication was chosen as an initial focus.
- The school's environment is well thought out with inviting reading spaces, organised classrooms and useful and engaging communal areas. All of these contribute to a high level of pupil engagement in learning and positive behaviour.
- Working walls in classrooms reflect the learning taking place and there was evidence of them being used by pupils to support their learning.
- There is a clear emphasis on all staff's well-being and they feel involved and listened to by school leaders. Staff feel that leaders are approachable and fair in their approach and that their ideas for improvements are considered. The link governor speaks passionately about the need for all pupils to feel included and has a thorough understanding of the graduated approach.

CPD

- Currently there is a strong CPD focus around using the 'Oracy 21' project to improve effective communication and to develop staff understanding of key milestones and how to support the pupils' language development.
- Curriculum leaders access supportive professional networks to ensure the quality of St. Thomas's curriculum offer.
- When teaching assistants and support staff were interviewed, they were incredibly positive when talking about the support that they receive from leaders, teachers and each other, feeling like they are all part of a very effective and pupil driven team.

Person Centred Planning

- Pupil meetings are structured around person-centred approaches, e.g., annual reviews.
- Parents/carers described how school have been 'incredible' in their support of both the pupils and families when challenges have presented. A couple of them said that St Thomas' was the only school willing to offer their child a place and how grateful they are for all the support they have received. One parent quoted that, 'There is something very special about the staff and how they work with the children.'

- Due to an increase in the levels of need of some of the younger pupils in school, St. Thomas's has developed a provision specifically to meet these high levels of need. The Harbour is a smaller provision within school, with the curriculum being very bespoke and sensory friendly.

Understanding and valuing difference

- Staff demonstrate a clear understanding of individual pupils' needs and a dedication to meet these through Inclusive Ordinarily Available Provision and individual interventions where required. They know the pupils well and can identify early on if there is something that requires some extra support.
- All pupils and their families reported feeling valued by staff in the school, regardless of their background or presenting difficulties.

Policies and plans

- Strong policies and plans are in place to support the inclusive approach towards meeting the needs of all pupils. Provision is carefully and strategically allocated with all the individual pupils' requirements being accounted for. This allows school to take a proactive approach in early identification and intervention, where this is required, as evidenced by the school's Notice/Check/Try procedures, APDRs and provision maps.
- A key development in the school improvement work is the engagement with the Oracy 21 programme. There is a clear, well-planned progression in place to improve the opportunities for pupils through developing strong communication skills.
- Makaton sign Language has also been introduced in the early years with reports that pupils with English as an additional language are now seeking less adult support.

Inclusive Learning

Curriculum and teaching

- The curriculum has been well designed to be engaging and broad, with 'Golden Threads' tying it all together.
- Teaching is well planned and delivered, the needs of all pupils accounted for through adaptive teaching and scaffolding where required. A range of teaching strategies were observed on the day with clarification and expansion of key learning points being used to develop and assess pupil understanding.
- Parents reported that extra-curricular opportunities are available for all pupils and school make any necessary adaptations to enable all pupils to access them.

Learning and progress of all groups

- From discussions with staff, it is clear that they understand that for pupils to make progress it is vital that formal and informal assessment data is used carefully to inform both the content and delivery of lessons. Strengths and needs of all pupils are taken into account when lessons are being planned and all steps of progress are tracked and celebrated.
- School provides all pupils with a strong OAIP offer and staff are skilled in early identification of need, putting Notice/Check/Try processes in place to try early intervention. If this isn't sufficient to meet the pupil needs, detailed APDR cycles are used to ensure that pupils have the right intervention and can make progress at their individual level.

- For those pupils whose needs cannot be fully met in the mainstream classroom, school set up 'The Harbour.' This operates as a small unit, similar to a resource provision, with a focus on highly tailored and multisensory delivery of the curriculum. Parents reported that it was like a family unit with staff working incredibly hard to ensure that pupils in there make progress, but most importantly are happy to attend school.

Supporting Emotional Health and Wellbeing

Resilience

- All staff have a good understanding that behaviour is a form of communication and challenging presentation often signifies that a need isn't being met. They work hard to identify what the need is and work collaboratively with staff, pupils and their families to address this need however possible. Pupils receive excellent support, both pastoral and academic, with skilled adult/pupil interactions being observed, as well as hearing the same from pupils and parents/carers alike.
- There are several pupils in the school with higher levels of need in the area of SEMH. There are a variety of strategies used to support these pupils, that also enable them to be included in daily school life with reduced risk of being overwhelmed. For those occasions where they do become dysregulated there are risk assessments and de-escalation plans in place to offer support.
- Learners in the school overwhelmingly reported that they felt safe and that adults were kind and helpful. The feeling of being safe and supported was echoed by staff, with reference being made to 'open door culture' from senior leadership alongside colleague support being strong.

Belonging

- Pupils are fully engaged in school life and are able to participate in several groups both in school, and the local community. The school parliament is a great example of this. The leader and deputy leader were fairly elected, having to write an application, deliver a speech and then be voted in.
- A key aim currently is for all pupils to feel a sense of belonging in the school and community, especially those who are new to the area and may not have supportive links yet. They are due to give speeches in other schools about this and made cards in church to be given to some of these families.
- There is also a focus on local community with activities including litter picking, a bird watching survey and a visit to the local care home.

Participation and Involvement

Whole school approach & Participation of stakeholders

- The school environment is warm and friendly with a very strong feeling of community.
- Parents/carers feel that they can speak to staff freely about any concerns that they have and feedback from them during the visit was overwhelmingly positive as they all shared what a difference being at St Thomas' made to their child's lives.
- Several of them stated that it was 'the only school that would offer their child a place' due to significant SEN. These pupils have all settled well and made good progress towards

their individual outcomes, with one parent commenting on the improved independence of their child over the years they have attended.

- Regular SEN review meetings are held with pupil voice at the centre. Progress towards outcomes is shared with parents/carers, with them being encouraged to support them at home where possible.

What is working exceptionally well?

- School's work on the 'Oracy 21' project is carefully considered and progressing well, with impact already being seen in each lesson where pupils use sentence starters to answer questions and debate. Language use is well reinforced, and pupils are encouraged to expand on short answers to fully show their understanding.
- Makaton being introduced in the early years has already shown success, with pupil independence increasing.
- Staff plan lessons well and cater to the needs of all pupils through strong Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision, reasonable adjustments and intervention where required.
- Staff receive well planned CPD aligned with the school priorities. Their varied strengths and skills are well used to improve the pupils' learning experiences.
- The staff team is obviously a very supportive, committed and motivated one, driven by the desire to give all pupils the best possible opportunities and prepare them for the future. They have very high and realistic expectations of all pupils and do everything they can to ensure that each one can reach their potential.
- Pupil and parent/carers comments were overwhelmingly positive too, with words like safe, supported and family being used often.

What might school consider in moving forward?

- Consider whether seating all pupils in groups, rather than some classes being in rows, could improve the communication opportunities and skills between pupils.
- Pupils could also be seated in mixed ability groups where appropriate, so that the ones with a deeper understanding of the learning can support others if they get stuck.
- Review displays in classrooms. Some could be a little busy and as a result either overwhelming or difficult to access for some pupils.

Final outcome

As a result of this accreditation visit, Bury Council is delighted to be able to re-accredit St. Thomas C.E. Primary School with the Bury Inclusion Quality Mark.

Bury Council professionals conducting the accreditation:

Ian Sutcliffe

SEND Support Lead – Bury Council

Katie Hellon

SENCO and Assistant Headteacher – Woodbank Primary School

Date: Monday 16th March 2026