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Inclusion Quality Mark Accreditation Report

St Thomas's CE Primary School

Roch Valley Multi-Academy Trust

3 December 2019

St Thomas's CE Primary School (St Thomas's) is situated in the centre of Bury serving a mixed community in terms of culture, religion and socioeconomic status. The majority of pupils attending St Thomas's are of Pakistani heritage. The cohort of SEND learners at St Thomas's comprises five pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan, four pupils in receipt of SEN Support Plus funding and 56 pupils at SEN Support.

St Thomas's has already been accredited with a North West regional Dyslexia Aware Quality Mark. St Thomas's joined the cluster of schools working towards achievement of Bury's full Inclusion Quality Mark from the outset and is the second school to have been assessed against the 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 by the LA's service manager for inclusion and the two Primary Inclusion Leads, leading Bury's schools' Primary Inclusion Partnerships. The accreditation process was overseen by Caroline Haughton, deputy head teacher and Gail Hughes, higher level teaching assistant, who have been jointly responsible for the developments in school to meet the standards.

Scrutiny of policies, data, evidence of children's work, pupil records, school plans and self-evaluation documentation had already taken place at a pre-accreditation visit on 31 October 2019 and foci for the final accreditation visit had been agreed with school.

Activities for the accreditation visit itself included:

- Scrutiny of the progress and inclusion of three target pupils, selected to represent the range of pupil need at St Thomas's
- Interview with the senior leadership team (SLT) and governors
- Interview with parents and carers
- Interview with the RAVE school council along with the selected target pupils
- A learning walk through the school incorporating lunchtime outdoor play activities

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- Interviews with a range of staff members including assistant head teachers, class teachers, teaching assistants and welfare staff
- Interview with the Inclusion/SEND/SEMH team.

Whole School Approaches

Ethos

St Thomas's School is a welcoming and well-organised learning environment. The school is remarkably presented to reflect a total celebration of children and their learning. A passionate and committed staff team show that they are extremely proud of their work.

The deputy head teacher, who is also the inclusion champion, SEND lead, SEMH lead and Senco have worked tirelessly to establish and maintain the highest of standards where inclusion is concerned. The SEN/Inclusion Team is effective and pro-active; strong leadership is recognised by staff and parents alike. Pride in their achievements was evident throughout the accreditation and they presented the school and all of its stakeholders with attention to detail.

At the time of the pre-accreditation visit, there had recently been a phone call from a former parent who had contacted school to say thank you for all of the support they had given to her son, a pupil with additional needs who had failed school placements prior to starting at St Thomas's. She thanked the deputy head teacher for never giving up on him and for giving him the best start to his education; the call was to let school know that he had just started at university which this parent had at one stage, never dreamed possible. Better exemplification of a long standing and embedded inclusive ethos would be hard to find.

Leadership and Governance

Trustees and Governors believe that inclusion is central to the Trust's mission statement; they describe how St Thomas's has been central to the development of this statement through sharing their culture of success and self-belief. They describe how children are at the heart of all decisions made at a Trustee or Governor level.

Trustees and Governors consider the school leadership exceptional in terms of knowing and understanding pupil need along with the establishment of systems to transfer information from staff to senior managers. One Trustee said, 'There is no complacency in this school'.

Trustees and Governors have active involvement in school life, from classroom visits to consultations with staff and pupils. They understand their pupils and staff very well and talk with confidence and knowledge about how inclusion has developed at St Thomas's.

The focus of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and the actions outlined are linked to school priorities, for example, a key focus at the time of the accreditation had been placed on curriculum development, in particular how it addresses Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) need. An initial audit had been carried out at staff meetings against the current curriculum delivery. Following this, a curriculum presentation had been made by each class including a focus on establishing an inclusive environment. A second SIP focus with relevance to inclusion is to maximise the impact of Teaching Assistants (TAs).

CPD

The school CPD plan is linked to the Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) and SIP and sets out priorities for the year ahead. It is well organised and focused on addressing the needs

of the learners as identified through data analysis. CPD is organised for all staff, including welfare staff.

Person Centred Planning

Pupil meetings are structured around person centred approaches, for example, annual reviews.

Understanding and valuing difference

A sense of equality was demonstrated throughout the visit. Diversity is a daily celebration and can be witnessed in every aspect of school life. This was demonstrated for example through a display of artefacts from Ghana which had been brought into school by one child so that the others could learn about where he came from.

Policies and plans

Safeguarding systems work effectively; school's inclusive approach is reflected across the range of policies and procedures.

Inclusive Learning

Curriculum and teaching

There has been a keen focus on the development of a curriculum for inclusion which is outlined in the School Improvement Plan. The curriculum developments, which are still in progress this year, focus appropriately on the inclusion of St Thomas's pupils, for example, the focus on resilience introduced for all pupils, or the additional Literacy support for Y4 pupils. Other relevant foci have included vocabulary development and building children's first hand experiences. The whole school curricular enquiry of considering learning by working out 'where we are going and who we will meet' has worked well to bond learning to real life relevance through a curriculum designed to meet the needs of all learners.

Curriculum plans and schemes of work are appropriate to the children's ages and their stage of development. For example, there is a strong focus on language development in the EYFS with programmes such as Elklan and WellComm in regular use with all children. There are many examples in classrooms throughout school of children's collaborative work, for example in the Reception classes where children's learning about the structure of the rainforest had been recorded in collage and labelled by adults.

Classrooms are well organised and stimulating learning spaces where children are engaged and on task. St Thomas's is a calm yet purposeful learning community where adults and children alike demonstrate respectful working relationships with each other. Images of the children engaged in learning activities are visible at every turn ensuring that children know they are at the heart of the purpose of the school. Working walls are used consistently throughout the school to reinforce children's learning. Help stations are available in all classrooms to support children's independent learning.

Bilingual teaching support is used effectively, for example in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) where support is available for whole group teaching sessions to ensure access for every child and reading sessions are supported in first language.

In Key Stage one, children worked independently with a 'crackling fire' background visual on the interactive whiteboard; this had been chosen at the children's request to create a relaxed and quiet learning environment. Photographs, bilingual labels and other visuals are used consistently across school, displayed at appropriate child height.

In lower Key Stage two, children are encouraged to see themselves as experts in one area of school life and the theme of 'Bee an expert' runs across school. Children are independent learners with open access to IT equipment to aid their learning.

The 'Zen Den' is a space for pupils with additional needs, especially those with sensory needs, and provides a calm, quiet space when needed. There are plans for access to this space to be increased during the lunchtime period, which can be a time of stress for many children.

In upper Key Stage two, a wide acceptance of other cultures is evident through study and display. All children are encouraged to share their own background information through 'All about me' booklets right through to Y6.

Pupils with SEND are well supported in class; this support is well organised and provision is managed very well by the Senco. School report that as Quality First Teaching has become increasingly inclusive, there has been a corresponding reduction in the need for intervention which requires withdrawal from class.

Extra-curricular activities are organised in consultation with the children, for example, pupils recently pointed out too heavy a focus on sports activities and plans were made to address this. All year groups are offered a fair chance to contribute to the choice of extra-curricular activities; the activities on offer therefore change over time.

Learning and progress of all groups

Pupil progress is understandably a key focus for all staff. Staff are very clear about their individual roles and present as a close knit team. They support each other to share ideas and strategies as well as to standardise their approaches, for example in their use of PIVATs to assess those pupils not yet working at National Curriculum levels. Staff recognise the strong senior leadership and its impact in establishing the highest of expectations for all pupils. One member of staff described this as 'wanting to be better together'. Staff feel valued and listened to, reporting many instances of consultation by Trustees, Governors and senior managers in school.

Evidence of the target pupils' learning (as representative of the progress of pupils with SEND) was presented through collated profiles of each learner. Each profile gave a clear picture of the journey of all three pupils and access to pupil data through the school management system was easy to navigate. None of the evidence seen needed to be in addition to the regular school systems, which have been proven to work seamlessly to be able to access the required information.

School had bravely selected two of the three target pupils with a significant level of SEMH need. St Thomas's has developed its own SEMH assessment tool, which establishes a clear list of 'non-negotiables' for managing SEMH need. With different approaches to the measuring and recording of progress, it may have been difficult to have evidenced the amount of progress made by these pupils. However, progress in the area of SEMH was exceptional and for one of the longer standing pupils, had cleared the pathway for academic progress to start to be evident. Expectations of what the children can achieve could not be higher.

Transition

Transition is viewed holistically at St Thomas's. Staff described many different forms of support for transition, regardless of whether the transition was within school, new to school or leaving school. Some of the strategies described were gathering information, making visits with familiar staff, getting to know parents, being friendly, invitations to regular events, for example 'stay and play' events, mixing informally with parents, more formal half day transition sessions, listening to pupil voice, using a

buddy system and running an international new arrivals group to support the development of friendships.

Staff listed what they believed to be key elements for successful transitions; 'it needs to be all about communication', 'it needs a whole school plan', 'a flexible approach is essential for pupils with SEND'. Staff demonstrated a strong pupil focus when discussing transitions and noted that checking children's understanding, providing time, showing patience and 'giving a moment' to children were all extremely important in ensuring successful transitions.

Supporting Emotional Health and Well-being

Resilience

As previously mentioned, developments are already under way to place a purposeful focus through the curriculum on the development of resilience for all pupils.

St Thomas's School is a place where both learners and staff feel safe. One staff member commented on the closeness of staff relationships which meant that staff felt supported on many levels.

At the school council meeting, children described their title 'RAVE' as representing their desire to 'Respect And Value Everyone'. Although bullying was not specifically mentioned, children talked about what could be done if a child was left out or had no friends; they said you could ask your buddy, ask a peer mediator or go to the family room for help. They said it felt nice to help. Peer mediators were observed in action at lunchtime; these responsible and well-trained children were very clear about their roles and demonstrated pride in going about their business helping others. There were no incidences of unkindness between pupils observed at any time throughout the day.

There are many inclusive strategies in place across school with a particular focus on meeting SEMH need and children's well-being. Examples included notes passed by staff to pupils throughout the day just to let them know that someone is thinking about them or pleased with something they have done; 'jar of happiness'; 'worry box' and 'worry monsters'; the 'affirmation station'. All of these strategies demonstrate the St Thomas's commitment to caring.

There are no exclusions at St Thomas's School, either permanent or fixed term, and there have been no incidences of internal exclusion or seclusion.

Belonging

St Thomas's is a strong and caring community. A foster carer who was already familiar with many of the local schools said, 'there is a really good feeling in this school'. Parents explained how they felt that the pastoral care at St Thomas's is second to none; one parent said, 'School has a big impact on children with other needs'. Parents paid each other compliments during their interviews and demonstrated that they each felt a welcome part of the school community. Another parent recounted an instance where she was experiencing personal difficulties and was touched that staff had noticed and telephoned to see if there was anything that could be done to help. She described how staff had been accepting of her need and were patient regarding homework; 'Caroline is amazing'.

Pupils are confident in their sense of belonging within the school community. On the day of the visit, a group of pupils presented a Christmas tree ornament for one member of staff whose pet cat had recently passed away. The pupils had done this totally independently and had had the ornament engraved with the pet's name.

Participation and Involvement

Whole school approach

Participation is accepted as a way of life across the whole school community; no one is excluded from school life and everyone's opinions matter. Trustees, Governors and senior leaders regularly consult with parents, carers and pupils for a range of purposes. This consultation approach forms part of the school monitoring schedule and is valued by senior leaders as a key source of information.

Participation of stakeholders

Parents are readily invited into school on a regular basis, for example, class based sessions for Reception parents who had requested to understand more about the curriculum.

Relationships with parents and carers are strong. Parents gave an example in relation to the addition of LGBT education to the curriculum. Levels of concern within the community had been high regarding the changes but school listened and acted immediately to allay parental fears. School explained their approach in an accessible way to the community through a focus on diversity of family make up; one parent explained, 'It is just about noting that every family is different with a focus on families and relationships'.

Parents of pupils with SEND were most complimentary about the progress of their children. One parent who moved their child to St Thomas's from another school said, 'I can't believe this is the same child!' Another carer described a child coming into her care over the Christmas holiday and her disbelief when staff were waiting for the child to arrive on the first day. She described her full involvement in all meetings and decision making and talked about staff as kind, patient and wanting to help. This carer described a real partnership between home and school.

Wider community links

School demonstrated many links with the community, for example through the various religious communities serving their families or through visits to the retirement community at the top of the street. St Thomas's is a school where first-hand experience for its learners is of a high priority and much of the curriculum is delivered in the community, for example the local park and the local farm. At the time of the visit, the children were preparing for a whole school trip on the Santa Express!

What is working exceptionally well?

One of the key strengths of this accreditation is the consistency with which inclusion is approached in school, from Trustees to pupils. Everyone genuinely understands and values what true inclusivity brings to education and to the well-being of every person linked with the school. Staff have a 'can do' attitude which is evident at every encounter and as a result, behaviour for learning is exemplary. Comprehensive systems and processes underpin the smooth running of this school and the progress of the children. This is a real learning community where strong, skilful leadership is key and parents and staff recognise this.

Where children experience any difficulty with learning, there is a priority focus on identification of pupil need first and foremost and plans for how to address needs follow swiftly. St Thomas's staff team are masters at early intervention, the majority of which is carried out as part of whole class practice, rather than in isolation of other learners. Class teachers take full responsibility for this with every teacher organising their intervention plans on a class provision map. This particular element of inclusive practice is exemplary.

What might school consider in moving forward?

Participation and Involvement

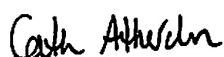
Although both participation and consultation with stakeholders are elements of strength at St Thomas's, instances of co-production should be steadily increased to include revisions of policy, process and systems as a matter of routine. Involving parents/carers or community groups at the point of starting a project, rather than consulting with them once decisions have been made, would be the icing on the cake of inclusion as represented at St Thomas's School.

Note re: Inclusive Learning

School's timely focus on maximising the use of TAs is highly appropriate; had school not already acknowledged this as an area for development, mention would have been made to address the amount of administrative tasks observed being carried out by TAs during the visit. However, some allowance has to be made for the time of year in which the visit was made as there was a good deal of pre-Christmas activity underway! It will be interesting to observe at the time of re-accreditation how developments have supported this already highly inclusive school.

As a result of this accreditation visit, Bury Council is delighted to be able to award the status of our Inclusion Quality Mark to St Thomas's CE Primary School.

Bury Council professionals conducting the accreditation:



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