

Lower Darwen Primary School

Milking Lane, Lower Darwen. BB3 0RB.

Inspection dates 23–24 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- In this much improved school, pupils get off to a good start in their learning in the caring and inclusive Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Progress for pupils is at least good through Key Stages 1 and 2 resulting in above average standards by the end of Year 6.
- The quality of teaching is good and is improving strongly. As a result, all groups of pupils achieve well, regardless of their background or ability levels.
- Attendance is above average. Pupils enjoy school and are keen to learn.
- Pupils' good behaviour contributes to the calm, purposeful atmosphere in classrooms. They feel safe in school.
- School leaders and governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have taken decisive action which has resulted in improvements in the quality of teaching leading to better pupil performance.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There are not enough lessons in which the quality of teaching is outstanding
- Pupils are not always sure about how they can improve their work or what they need to do to reach the next step in their learning

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors had meetings with staff, groups of pupils, the Chair and other members of the Governing Body, and with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors looked at a range of evidence including: the school’s improvement plan; the school’s data for tracking pupils’ progress; monitoring reports; the work pupils were doing in their books; and the school’s documentation relating to safeguarding.
- Teaching and learning were observed in twenty lessons and groups of pupils were listened to reading.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher conducted joint observations with the inspectors. The inspector also observed senior managers reporting back to teachers on the quality of learning and pupils’ achievement in lessons.
- The inspectors met some parents informally at the start of the school day and took into account the responses to the school’s own survey of parents’ views. There were also 23 responses from parents to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) which were reviewed by inspectors.

Inspection team

Gordon Alston , Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Lynne Read

Additional Inspector

Allyson Ingall

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average size primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average.
- The proportions of pupils supported at school action and at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are below the national average.
- The school has a unit attached to it which caters for pupils with hearing impairment. These pupils spend most of their time in classrooms with pupils of a similar age.
- The school meets the current floor standards which set the government's minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- The school has achieved Healthy School status.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding by:
 - ensuring that pupils know what they are learning about and why, so that they are helped to have a clear understanding of the steps needed for success
 - making sure that most effective use is made of the adult support that is available
 - providing pupils with opportunities to take more responsibility for their own learning in lessons, especially more able pupils
 - using the outstanding teachers in the school to provide models for other teachers in order to improve their teaching.
- Provide pupils with clear information on how they can improve their work or achieve the next step in their learning by:
 - ensuring that when teachers mark pupils' work they give pupils clear points on how to improve it
 - providing pupils with time in lessons to respond to teachers' comments when books are marked
 - developing a consistent approach to setting pupils' learning targets.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- In the Early Years Foundation Stage children enter with skills expected for their age and make progress that is consistently good, especially in language and communication. The development of the outdoor play area has been a great success and provides a play haven for children, impacting positively on progress in all areas of learning.
- In Key Stages 1 and 2 the proportion of pupils making and exceeding expected progress in English and mathematics compares favourably with the national figures. This good level of achievement is evident in the work pupils do in lessons.
- Attainment in Year 6 has risen for the last two years and is above average. The school's data on checking pupils' progress show that nearly all pupils are currently making good progress from their individual starting points.
- The small numbers of pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium do well at this school, achieving as well as other pupils in the school and nationally because of effective support and extra help.
- Pupils have good speaking and listening skills. They are confident in expressing their views and eager to take part in discussions. Partner talk also shows that pupils can ask relevant questions. Discussions with pupils show that they enjoy learning and being at school; they thoroughly enjoy reading and solving problems in mathematics.
- Work in pupils' books shows examples of good extended writing in Key Stage 2, for example, when pupils wrote about living conditions in Victorian England. Good progress is also evident in mathematics books; for example, where pupils explore problems which involved deciding what sort of calculations they needed to do.
- Pupils who are hearing-impaired and those who have special educational needs benefit from specialist support provided by capable teaching assistants, as well as expertise secured through the outside agencies. Pupils who may be vulnerable are well cared for and also make good progress. Pupils, parents and staff all believe that these pupils make good progress at this school and are supported well to do so.
- Reading skills are taught well. Pupils read widely and confidently. Pupils know letters and sounds well and this has enabled the vast majority of pupils to read fluently at an early age. Older pupils enjoy reading and read often, either within a group or individually.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good but not enough is yet outstanding. In Years 5 and 6 teaching is outstanding because pupils are fully challenged and tasks make learning fun. Inspection evidence confirms that the good leadership of teaching is rapidly developing the skills of new staff.
- In the most effective lessons teachers match activities closely to the learning needs of all pupils. They often move learning on briskly and demonstrate well-focused and demanding questioning techniques that keep pupils alert and fully engaged in learning.
- Reading is taught very well throughout the school. Teachers skilfully support and challenge pupils with probing questions. This approach, combined with stimulating activities and very good resources, ensures that all pupils make good progress.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge leads to the necessary flexibility in approach to respond to pupils' learning needs. Occasionally, a combination of inexperience and questioning that lacks real focus on pupils' next steps in their understanding frustrates pupils. As a result, some pupils make slower progress than expected.
- Also, where teaching is less strong, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to learn on their own without the help of adults.
- Pupils are keen to do well, apply themselves diligently in lessons and work at a good pace. They

seek to produce their best work and are interested and enthusiastic about their learning in all subjects.

- In the best lessons observed, marking and dialogue between teachers and pupils were of a very high quality. However, this is not consistent in all classes. At times, pupils do not understand how to improve their work and are not given enough time to respond to the teachers' comments in their work books.
- Teachers use assessment information to plan well-structured lessons for the wide range of ages and abilities in their classes. For example, in one well-taught mathematics lesson, pupils worked keenly on looking for patterns in number sequences and were able to explain very clearly their thinking and the mathematical process they were learning. Later, in the same lesson, pupils used self-evaluation to identify how they had improved their understanding and what they would need to do next to improve further.
- Teaching assistants are trained very well and adept at supporting individuals and groups of pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, or the few who have a hearing impairment. They work closely with teachers and, when necessary, with external agencies to provide very good support and care for all pupils. However, best use is not always made of their time and skills, particularly at the start of lessons.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils behave very well at all times. They work well together and support each other in their learning. They are quick to praise their friends when they have a success. The thorough induction of new pupils ensures that they settle quickly. The school is calm and welcoming. 'There's always a warm, welcoming feeling when you come into school', is a typical parental comment.
- Pupils enjoy their learning and, as a result, they are keen to do their work and settle quickly to their tasks. In every classroom there is a positive atmosphere that enables learning and teaching to continue without any disruption.
- The consistent application of strategies across the school means that pupils who may sometimes find it difficult to manage their own behaviour are helped to stay on task and to handle relationships with others. The school has clear evidence of marked improvements in behaviour over time for individual pupils.
- Pupils understand about bullying, including name-calling. They acknowledge that the very few instances of bullying that occur in school are dealt with swiftly and effectively by the adults. As a result, they have no concerns.
- Pupils feel safe and understand how to keep themselves safe, including when using modern technologies. Pupils praised the work the school has done to help them understand this.
- The school works hard with parents to help them understand the importance of regular attendance. As a result, attendance is above average.

The leadership and management are good

- One of the main reasons that the school has improved so much since its previous inspection is because the headteacher has developed a culture where all staff work very effectively together. They are highly committed to ensuring that pupils achieve as well as they can. Middle managers now play an active role in school development.
 - Staff value the regular monitoring of the quality of teaching by senior leaders. As a result of training opportunities provided, the standards of teaching in writing and reading, and most recently in mathematics, have improved. Staff who are newly or recently qualified teachers are supported effectively.
 - Good systems are in place to make sure that teachers are held to account for every pupil's progress and that this is reflected in salary progression.
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- Relationships with parents are very positive. Reception class staff work hard to improve the way new parents are introduced to the school and how they can be involved in their children's learning. Regular parents' forums throughout the school enable parents to be involved in supporting their children's reading and writing. Parents value these opportunities.
 - The curriculum is tailored to meet the needs of pupils and, as part of this, pupils value special themed days and also enjoy the range of clubs, including the breakfast and after school club. Such activities contribute well to pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
 - Pupils enjoy a wide range of subjects such as in their topic work and there are some good examples of different types of writing across different subjects. The school provides a rich learning environment that makes school an enjoyable experience. There is a strong focus on promoting pupils' basic skills of literacy and numeracy which have had a positive effect on pupils' attainment.
 - The local authority provides effective light touch support for this good school.
 - **The governance of the school :**
 - The governing body has recently reviewed its role in the school and has set up a number of well-structured committees. Governors have attended a series of training events that have improved their knowledge and effectiveness significantly. The governing body provides good challenge and support for the school and ensures that statutory requirements are met through regular checks of safeguarding arrangements. Governors know the strengths of the school and what it needs to do to improve further. There is a healthy working relationship between the governing body, senior managers, staff and parents which, parents say, has developed an open and honest environment. Decisions have been made on how pupil premium funding is used in the school to provide targeted, extra support, both in and out of lessons. Regular updates are examined on how well this group of pupils achieves.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	119120
Local authority	Blackburn and Darwen
Inspection number	405830

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	280
Appropriate authority	The Governing Body
Chair	Lisa Gibson
Headteacher	Steven Cumbo
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2010
Telephone number	01254 55639
Fax number	01254 55456
Email address	steven.cumbo@blackburn.gov.uk

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