

St James' Church of England School Blackburn

Earl Street, Blackburn, Lancashire, BB1 8EN

Inspection dates 23–24 April 2013

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		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- A very conscientious headteacher, well supported by enthusiastic senior leaders and governors, provides excellent leadership and management and constantly communicates a strong vision for excellence and improvement in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- As a result, standards are rising and, from low starting points, particularly in language, pupils achieve well and reach average standards by Year 6.
- Teaching is good and, at times, outstanding.
- Pupils are delightful: their excellent attitudes to learning coupled with exemplary behaviour contribute positively to the strong ethos and to the good progress they make.
- Pupils speak proudly about their school, say they feel very safe and look forward to coming to school. Attendance is similar to that found in other schools.
- All groups of pupils, including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs and those eligible for pupil premium funding, make good progress. This is because of the good-quality support they receive in small groups or one to one.
- The school provides many interesting and memorable experiences for pupils including a range of exciting visits and visitors into school.
- This is a very caring school. Support and nurturing for families and for pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable are very effectively managed by a conscientious team of support staff.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough teaching that is outstanding to ensure pupils make rapid progress.
- Teachers do not always move pupils onto more demanding work quickly enough.
- Opportunities for pupils to manage, organise and assess their own learning are inconsistent.
- The quality of marking is variable and pupils do not always respond to the points teachers make.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 13 teachers and 17 lessons.
- Discussions were held with groups of pupils, members of the governing body, local authority personnel, parents and school staff.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and discussed the work they have been doing in class this academic year.
- Inspectors talked to parents and took account of the school's own parental survey but there were too few responses to the online survey (Parent View) to allow inspectors to review the results.
- They observed the school's work and scrutinised a number of documents, including the school's summary of how well it is doing, the school improvement plan, safeguarding documents and the school's own data for checking on pupils' progress.
- Inspectors analysed questionnaires completed by staff.
- In three classes pupils were not taught by their regular class teacher due to long-term absences.

Inspection team

Gordon Alston, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Stefan Lord

Additional Inspector

David Blackburne

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is an above-average-sized primary school.
- The great majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and English is not the first language for almost all of these pupils. A small number are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (extra money the school receives based on the number of pupils entitled to free school meals, looked after children and children from forces families) is average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is above average.
- The proportions of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are below the national average.
- The school meets the current floor standards which set the government's minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching from good to outstanding by:
 - making sure work always challenges and fully stretches pupils, particularly more-able pupils
 - carefully assessing pupils as they work and allowing pupils to move onto more challenging activities sooner in lessons
 - ensuring teachers' marking consistently provides pupils with clear guidance on how they can improve their work and providing pupils with time to respond to the marking
 - extending the pupil target-setting process so that pupils can manage and assess their targets themselves.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- In the past two years standards have risen. Currently standards in Year 6 are average in English and mathematics.
- When pupils start school their abilities are below those typically expected for their age and particularly weak in language development. Improved provision both indoors and outside, coupled with good and, at times, outstanding teaching, ensures Reception children get a good start. A strong focus on language is evident at all times and the ability of staff to speak the language which children speak at home is an excellent bonus in helping children learn well.
- Throughout Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 achievement in reading, writing and mathematics is good.
- Pupils' progress in writing is improving. Working with partner schools and successful training for teachers have improved the teaching of writing, leading to better progress. This was evidenced in pupils' books and through the school's own data. Writing tasks are well structured and supported and there are good opportunities for pupils to write at length in a range of subjects.
- The teaching of reading is given a high priority. Younger pupils make good progress in their knowledge of letters and sounds and apply them confidently in unlocking new words. Older pupils read fluently and with expression. Pupils read widely and often.
- Disabled pupils, minority ethnic pupils and those who have special educational needs do as well as other pupils in achieving well.
- In the national tests in 2012 the standards attained by pupils eligible for free school meals were more than one term behind their classmates in English and almost one term behind in mathematics. Additional funding through the pupil premium is used well for additional support in either small groups or one to one and, in particular, to ensure eligible pupils have more practice with reading. As a result, pupils who are eligible for this funding are making good progress and attain higher standards than similar pupils nationally.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching over time is good, with some outstanding teaching being seen during the inspection. The majority of teaching is lively, interesting and challenging and pupils enjoy their learning as a result. New ways of working and new staff, who have brought new ideas, have successfully strengthened the quality of teaching.
- In an outstanding literacy lesson pupils excitedly discussed how persuasive writing was used to engage the reader in advertisements. The teacher intervened very effectively to increase pupils' levels of understanding and a well-chosen range of resources supported pupils' learning and was cleverly linked to their own everyday experiences. Pupils collaborated well and strongly agreed how powerful this type of language was.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good because it provides a wide range of interesting and challenging experiences and good opportunities for children to talk, write, count and use computers, as well as extending their physical and creative development.
- In most lessons good assessment of pupils' progress informs lesson planning so that teachers or teaching assistants can make sure pupils' needs are met. Pupils have individual targets in writing and mathematics but the use being made of these and their impact on pupils' progress are inconsistent. Where this works best, pupils know what they need to do to improve and can manage and assess their targets themselves.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and give pupils helpful encouragement about where they have succeeded. The most effective marking also gives feedback on the next step in their learning and pupils are given time to respond to these comments. However, this good practice is inconsistent across the school. Pupils say they are not always given the time to reflect on

teachers' marking.

- Pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are developed well, underpinned by a strong focus on teaching basic skills. Disabled pupils, those learning English as an additional language and pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers. Conscientious teaching assistants, who are well trained and skilled, make sure individuals or small groups of pupils are well supported and move on with their learning.
- When teaching is not as strong, work is not always sufficiently well matched to pupils' abilities in order for them to be fully challenged, particularly for more-able pupils. For example, in mathematics a group of pupils are given ten sums to do but they do not increase in difficulty. Similarly, teachers are slow to see that pupils can do the given task easily and need a further challenge to extend their learning. This restricts pupils in making rapid progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Within lessons pupils' attitudes to learning are exemplary. They listen attentively, contribute to discussions confidently and work extremely hard. Pupils know they are valued as individuals. In lessons and discussions they display a maturity which is frequently beyond their years.
- The school is a very calm and orderly community. Pupils take a strong lead in promoting and engaging in outstanding behaviour which is manifest in their class and school rules. They relish the opportunities to take on responsibilities around the school. Outstanding behaviour is the norm at St James's. Pupils know the high standards of behaviour expected of them and meet these even when unsupervised. Around the school they play well together and are very kind to one another. Relationships are excellent.
- The school is developing close working relationships with outside agencies to support pupils and their families whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. Through these links an effective initiative has been established which has helped improve attendance, which is currently broadly average.
- The older children understand their responsibility to model good behaviour and safe practice. They ensure that, as well as looking after the younger children on the playground and around school, they help them understand how to behave well.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They have confidence in the school's procedures for keeping them safe and say they feel very secure at school. This view is confirmed by those parents who replied to the school's questionnaire.
- Discussions with pupils indicate that they understand what constitutes bullying in all its various forms. They are very confident in their ability to resolve any potential conflicts for themselves. An analysis of the school's own questionnaires for pupils confirmed these judgements.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher, together with senior leaders and managers, provides outstanding leadership. They are very well supported by leaders and managers at all levels and by members of the cohesive staff team. An ambitious vision and accurate evaluation have resulted in rapid and sustained improvements in achievement, attendance, teaching, behaviour and the curriculum since the previous inspection and demonstrate the school's strong capacity to improve further.
- Very effective systems for checking the impact of the school's work are well embedded. Analysis of performance is very detailed and leads to actions that continue to raise attainment. Success is evident in raising standards from significantly below average to standards that are currently average and, specifically, in the improvement in pupils' achievement in writing.
- The very effective partnership with other schools provides high-quality professional development for teachers, including coaching and whole-school training. As a result, teaching is now typically good and, at times, outstanding. Staff eagerly seize opportunities to share practice and to plan work or moderate assessments together with partner schools and within school.

- The performance of teachers is managed very well, with clear links between the rewards that teachers receive and pupils' good progress. Teachers are set clear targets linked to pupils' progress, thus promoting good or better teaching successfully.
- The creative curriculum offers a broad range of themed activities which are developed well with contributions from pupils. Consequently, the school provides rich and memorable experiences for pupils that prepare them well for their next steps in learning. There are many opportunities through the curriculum and in assemblies to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A range of well-attended, after-school clubs provides many opportunities for sports, arts and music activities.
- Engagement with parents is very positive. The school promotes equal opportunities extremely well. Leaders ensure that all pupils have the same opportunities and that there is no discrimination. The progress of groups of pupils is carefully tracked and all groups make good progress overall in this highly inclusive school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors give excellent support and strategic leadership. They carefully monitor the impact of the school's work in improving progress and rigorously hold leaders and managers to account. They rigorously question how decisions made will impact on pupils' learning. Governors hold the headteacher to account by setting performance management targets that link to pupils' progress. They make use of information on how well teaching and pupils' achievement are improving when making decisions on the rewards teachers receive. They have engaged in a range of training and all statutory requirements are met; governors are mindful of the importance of safeguarding. They know about the school's finances and have control over how money is spent. The governing body authorises the spending of pupil premium funding and receives information on how this is impacting on pupils' progress.

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	119502
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	401848

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	411
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Jump
Headteacher	Philip Morgan
Date of previous school inspection	12 October 2009
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