

Blackburn St Thomas' Church of England Primary School

Newton Street, Blackburn, Lancashire, BB1 1NE

Inspection dates 18–19 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- All groups of pupils make good progress and achieve well throughout the school.
- Teaching and learning are consistently good. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and plan and deliver lessons that lead to good progress.
- Disabled pupils, those with special educational needs, pupils eligible for the pupil premium and those who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as other pupils because they are well supported and work is carefully planned to meet their needs.
- Behaviour is good and pupils are respectful of each other and adults. Pupils enjoy coming to school and are keen to learn. They say that they feel safe and very well cared for.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have a clear and accurate understanding of the strengths of the school and how it can be further improved.
- Parents are very supportive and appreciative of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not yet outstanding. Teachers do not always make sure that all pupils, particularly the most-able pupils, are consistently challenged to reach the highest levels and make the best possible progress.
- Achievement in reading is not as strong as in writing and mathematics.
- There are too few opportunities for teachers to share best practice within the school, or to observe outstanding teaching in other schools.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 23 lessons or part lessons, including two joint observations with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors held meetings with school leaders and managers and with four governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors also met a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors held discussions with two groups of pupils and spoke informally to other pupils in lessons and during break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors looked at the work pupils were doing in lessons and in their books over time. They listened to pupils read and talked to them about their enjoyment of reading.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and examined a number of documents. These included data concerning pupils' current achievement, the quality of teaching and the school development plan. Inspectors also looked at records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding arrangements. Minutes of governing body meetings and the School Adviser's reports were also considered.
- Too few responses were received to analyse in the online questionnaire (Parent View), but inspectors considered responses to a school parental questionnaire. They also considered responses to the questionnaires completed by staff for the inspection.

Inspection team

Robert Birtwell, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Dave Blackburne

Additional Inspector

Barbara Martin

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Pupils are taught in 15 classes from Nursery to Year 6.
- A large majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with the two largest groups being Indian and Pakistani.
- Almost three quarters of the pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children looked after by the local authority and children from service families) is above average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs who are supported at school action is well-above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement so that a greater proportion of pupils make more than expected progress by:
 - ensuring that work is always matched closely to all pupils' needs, particularly the most-able pupils, so that they are consistently challenged to reach the highest levels and make the best possible progress
 - raising pupils' attainment and their rates of progress in reading so that they at least match those in writing and mathematics.
- Improve the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring that there are more opportunities for teachers to share existing best practice within the school, and to observe outstanding teaching in other schools.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children join the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and understanding that are generally well below those expected for their age. They make good progress in the Nursery and Reception Years and are well prepared to enter Key Stage 1 with standards that are closer to the national average.
- Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1. At the end of Year 2, standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics are below, but close to, the national average.
- Pupils continue to make good progress throughout Key Stage 2. Attainment in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6 improved in 2012 and was broadly average. Preliminary results for 2013 show further improvement. The proportion of pupils who made at least the expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics is above average. The proportion that made more than expected progress is above average in writing and mathematics, and just below average in reading.
- The school's detailed tracking information shows that all groups of pupils are making good progress across the school, whatever their individual starting points. This includes pupils from Indian and Pakistani backgrounds. Inspection evidence from lesson observations and work in pupils' books confirm that pupils make good progress across the school.
- Pupils make good progress in reading. Teachers make sure that pupils read regularly and have a good knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they make). The proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the Year 1 national phonics check in 2013 was just below the national average. However, attainment and progress in reading is not as strong as in writing and mathematics at both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Fewer pupils make more than expected progress in reading than in writing and mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress. Their needs are accurately identified and they receive good support. As a result, they achieve as well as other pupils.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language receive very effective support. For example, they have additional sessions to equip them with the vocabulary they need ahead of lessons. This enables them to participate fully in lessons and make good progress.
- Pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium make progress at a faster rate than other pupils in the school. Test results at the end of 2012 showed that the attainment of these pupils was the same as other pupils in English and approximately a term behind in mathematics. School data show that this gap in performance is closing rapidly.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good across the school and this enables pupils to learn well. Pupils made good progress in almost all the lessons seen during the inspection.
- Teachers have high expectations and know pupils well. They plan lessons that motivate and engage pupils in their learning, and use praise effectively. As a result, pupils enjoy lessons, have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to do well.
- In the best lessons where pupils progress most rapidly, teachers match work carefully to the needs and abilities of all pupils and ensure there is a good pace and challenge to learning. There are opportunities for pupils to work independently or in groups investigating ideas or solving problems. Questioning is used skilfully to test pupils' knowledge and understanding, and to challenge and extend their learning.
- In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, for example, pupils had a very clear understanding of what they were trying to learn. The teacher made sure that different groups of pupils, including the most able, had different and challenging tasks to estimate and measure angles. Effective teaching

moved the lesson at a brisk pace and as a result, all pupils made good progress.

- In other lessons, work is less well matched to pupils' different needs and abilities. Teachers do not always give pupils work which is challenging enough, particularly the most able. In these lessons the pace of learning is slower and pupils do not have enough opportunity to reach the highest levels and to make the best possible progress.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work closely together. They use a range of strategies to help pupils who are making slower progress. Pupils who need extra support receive it, either within lessons or in individual or small group sessions. This includes pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium, those who are disabled or have special educational needs, and those who speak English as an additional language. As a result, these pupils make good progress and achieve as well as other pupils in the school.
- Work in pupils' books displays clear progress showing that teaching has been good over time. Work is marked regularly, and there is a good balance of praise and suggestions for improvement. As a result, pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour throughout the school is good and, at times, outstanding. Pupils have positive attitudes to school and are typically polite and courteous. There is a very calm, orderly and inclusive atmosphere, and pupils get on very well with each other and their teachers.
- Pupils say they feel very safe in school and are well looked after. They understand the different forms bullying can take, but say that it is very rare in school. They are very confident that the school would deal swiftly and effectively with any issues if they arose. They know how to keep themselves safe in different situations, including when using the internet.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and are keen to learn. Attendance has been improving. It was above average in 2012 but fell slightly in 2013 due to the timing of religious holidays.
- School behaviour records show that behaviour is typically good. A consistent approach to managing behaviour means that learning continues without disruption. Occasionally, some pupils display challenging behaviour but this is dealt with effectively when it happens. As a result, the school can demonstrate real improvements in behaviour for such pupils.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has a strong vision for the school and its future development. This is shared by staff, governors and parents and is demonstrated by the strong support for the school shown in the parent and staff questionnaires. There is a very positive atmosphere throughout the school.
- School leaders have a very clear understanding of the strengths of the school and where it needs to do better. The school development plan correctly identifies the key priorities for improvement and sets ambitious but realistic targets. For example, leaders are aware that progress in reading is not as strong as in writing and mathematics and have a detailed plan in place to raise achievement.
- Robust systems are used to check regularly and accurately on pupils' progress. Any underachievement is addressed by providing extra help when pupils need it. As a result, all groups of pupils in the school are making good progress. This shows the school's successful commitment to equality of opportunity for all pupils.
- Information about pupils' progress is taken into account when making recommendations about teachers' pay progression.
- Effective systems are in place to check on the quality of teaching. These identify where further support is needed. Training, coaching and mentoring have improved the quality of teaching.
- While teaching is consistently good, it is not yet outstanding. There are too few opportunities for staff to share best practice within the school or to observe outstanding teaching in other schools.

- The curriculum is well planned and meets pupils' needs well. It is enhanced by a range of clubs, activities, trips and visits. For example, the school has an established link with a school in a very different social and cultural environment in the Lake District. As a result, pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good.
- The school is using the new primary school sport funding to improve the quality of the teaching of physical education in the school by bringing in specialist teachers from a local secondary school to teach lessons, run activities and train staff.
- Since the last inspection, the school has worked hard and successfully to engage with parents. Parent workshops have proved to be extremely popular. As a result, parents are very supportive and appreciative of the school.
- The local authority has provided light touch but effective support for this successful school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a good understanding of the school's context, strengths and areas needing improvement. They have a clear overview of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. They are very supportive of the school, but also challenge and hold it to account when necessary by asking searching questions and by setting challenging targets as part of the headteacher's performance management. They make sure that pupils' progress is taken into account when making decisions about teachers' pay. Governors contribute to the school's self-evaluation, and undertake training to keep their skills up to date. They understand how pupil premium funding is spent and the impact it is having on pupils' progress. They make sure that the school's finances are sound. The governing body ensures that it meets its statutory requirements, including those related to safeguarding.

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	119355
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	426254

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	421
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs I Umer
Headteacher	Mrs C Lord
Date of previous school inspection	29 September 2008
Telephone number	01254 54706
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