

St Stephen's CE Primary School

Robinson Street, Blackburn, Lancashire, BB1 5PE

Inspection dates

3–4 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make good progress from their individual starting points and an increasing number of pupils make even faster progress. Attainment has been improving and is now average and rising to above average in aspects of reading and writing.
- Provision in the early years is effective and enables the children to settle happily in school. Children enjoy an imaginative range of activities and make good progress.
- The quality of teaching has improved and is now consistently good with some that is outstanding. Pupils declare that they enjoy learning.
- This is a friendly and happy school. Behaviour is good and pupils are polite and helpful. They say they feel safe and are in no doubt that staff will help them if they have any problems.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is particularly strong. This is a community where pupils learn to respect and value the differences in their faiths and cultures. Pupils understand they have a role to play in society and in lessons often debate how they can fulfil this role.
- The headteacher is an exemplary leader and has overcome many barriers in the school's journey to improve. Support from senior leaders has been paramount in this process. Actions have been precise and effective in improving teaching and achievement.
- Governors have played a crucial role in ensuring the school improves. Training, alongside more contact with the school, has enhanced their understanding of what is working well and the next priorities.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching does not always ensure tasks match the different needs of pupils. Teachers provide useful advice when marking pupils' work but this is not always followed up to ensure pupils learn from their errors.
- Occasionally, pupils do not fully understand what they have read.
- The outdoor area for children in the early years is not of the same high quality as indoors.
- The leaders of subjects are involved in a wide range of activities to check on teaching and pupils' progress in their subjects. This information is used effectively in setting priorities in English and mathematics but less so in other subjects.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all classes and in small groups.
- Discussions were held with staff, members of the governing body, representatives of the local council and the local authority, and with pupils.
- Pupils' work was scrutinised with a focus on early years, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils read to the inspectors.
- A range of documents was reviewed including the school's development plan, subject action plans, the checks made on pupils' progress, the minutes of meetings held by the governing body and information about safeguarding.
- Inspectors took account of the 26 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), results of the school's own parent questionnaire and also spoke to parents as they dropped the children off at school.
- Forty-two responses to the staff questionnaire were analysed.

Jennifer Platt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Diane Palin

Additional Inspector

David Woodhouse

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and eligible for support through the pupil premium is slightly above the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- All pupils in the early years attend full time.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is very high (96.5%) and the first language of most of these pupils is not English.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress.
- There have been several new staff appointments since the previous inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching even further and increase pupils' progress by:
 - keeping a close eye on pupils' learning to check that tasks match closely pupils' needs
 - checking that pupils respond to teachers' comments when they have marked their work so they learn from their mistakes especially their spellings
 - making sure that pupils fully understand what they are reading in instructions and tasks as well as in their reading books
 - improving the outdoor space for children in the early years.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - sharing the good practice of the leaders of English and mathematics with other subject leaders so that they make better use of the information available when setting priorities for the subjects they lead.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides exceptional leadership for the school. Barriers to improvement since the previous inspection have been overcome and difficult decisions made in the best interest of the pupils. Senior leaders have shared these responsibilities and the team have combined their skills effectively to ensure the journey to becoming an effective school has been successful. The turbulence in staffing has stabilised and the school is well placed to move forward.
- The evaluation of what is working well and what aspects need further attention is thorough and accurate. This has helped the school to keep a close eye on improvements and identify the next steps as they have moved forward.
- Pupils' progress is checked closely and information used to identify pupils needing support to catch up or an extra boost to reach even higher levels. This is most effective in identifying those who need extra help in speaking English. Bi-lingual support is provided if needed especially for newcomers to the country and this helps them to improve their confidence and learn more effectively. The school is currently gathering information about how to put in place the national changes being made to assessment procedures.
- Senior staff, middle leaders and those with responsibility for subjects work alongside one another to evaluate the quality of teaching. Activities include observing teaching, reviewing pupils' books, informal walks around school as well as gaining pupils' views about teaching. Feedback identifies aspects to improve and support is provided. As a result, teaching has improved and there is more consistency in the application of policies. There remain some aspects that require further improvement. Marking has improved since the previous inspection although best practice is not fully consistent throughout school.
- Leaders use the information gained from monitoring teaching and achievement to draw up the school's development plan. Priorities are identified and discussions with leaders show clarity of what needs most attention in school. For example, the results of the national screening of phonics (letters and their sounds) indicated that pupils in Year 1 did not all reach the expected level. Response was prompt with the teaching of these skills introduced in the early years, and attainment is rising.
- Leaders in charge of the key stages in school and those in charge of English and mathematics are effective in identifying aspects to improve and implementing effective change. Leaders of other subjects, some of whom are new to the role, are developing their skills. They are involved in checking on teaching and pupils' progress but do not always use the information to identify precise priorities linked to raising pupils' rates of progress.
- Teachers are set targets based on their performance and the progress pupils make. Regular meetings are held to discuss any concerns and teachers come prepared to account for any dips and support is provided. Salary rewards are linked to achievement of these appraisal targets.
- The curriculum is organised successfully and meets the needs of pupils very well. Literacy and numeracy skills are carefully plotted across subjects to enable pupils to practise their skills. For example, Year 6 pupils wrote a letter explaining Mary's feeling about the life of Jesus. Pupils often enter school with limited experiences of the wider world. Clubs and visits, including a residential visit, extend their horizons considerably.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. The different cultures in the school are celebrated. During the inspection the overall school focus was on peace and pupils had written prayers with requests to 'stop conflict' and 'let peace spread in their school'.
- Pupils learn a great deal about British values. Year 6 pupils discussed very maturely the setting up of the United Nations and its aim to resolve conflict without war. They shared their views on solving their differences by discussion. Pupils learn the importance of taking responsibility as they raise funds towards school visits. These activities prepare pupils very well for life in modern Britain and also support the effective promotion of equality of opportunity. Displays identify 'All of us Matter' and this is reflected in the fostering of good relationships and tackling of any discrimination.
- Pupil premium is spent wisely to benefit the needs of disadvantaged pupils. This includes family learning opportunities to raise the aspirations of pupils as well as support in school to boost their academic progress and ensure they do not miss any educational opportunities.
- Effective use is made of the primary school sport funding. Dance has risen in importance with the employment of a dance tutor and the introduction of an after-school club. Staff observe professional coaches and improve their skills. Additional equipment has improved activities at play which enhance physical and social skills.
- The local authority has provided effective support with new appointments and training to address specific concerns as the school has moved forward.

- Safeguarding meets requirements. Staff are vetted to ensure they are suitable to work with children and training in child protection is up to date.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is effective. Governors have increased their knowledge of the everyday life of school with closer links with leaders and regular visits. Records of their visits are recorded and shared with staff and governors so that all learn from one another. Data about pupil's progress and attainment are reviewed and attainment is compared with other schools. Questions are raised about any lack of progress. Governors have an informed view of the quality of teaching and have not shirked their responsibility when teaching has not met the high standard now expected in school. They know that teachers are set challenging targets and check that salary increases are linked to the achievement of these targets.

The behaviour and safety of pupils **are good**

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They understand the sanctions and rewards in place and apply them diligently. Pupils are courteous to visitors, going out of their way to greet them and make their visit enjoyable.
- During acts of collective worship, behaviour and attention to what is being said are excellent. Pupils reflect on issues surrounding fairness and equality and are eager to be involved. The time offered for reflection is used respectfully as is the opportunity to shake hands and offer each other a sign of peace.
- At play pupils are energetic and yet overall give due attention to the needs of others. They share equipment amicably and older pupils are at hand to help if needed.
- In most lessons pupils are attentive and try hard. At times pupils are slow to settle or easily distracted if the work does not fully capture their interest. Most books show neat and tidy work although at times pupils have not completed enough and teachers make this very clear to them that they could do more.
- Teachers focus on raising pupils' self-esteem and pupils identify their future priorities such as 'high results in SATs' and future career options.
- Pupils enjoy school and value the friendships they have made. It is not surprising that attendance is above average.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils recognise the different types of bullying and how unkind actions can upset other people. They consider bullying has declined in their school because of stricter procedures and they know the consequences may include missing the visits that they value highly. Some pupils recall name-calling which was often linked to playing football or falling out with friends. They say this is sorted out with a focus on resolution and they talk about apologies given and accepted.
- Pupils are very aware of the hazards they might face in their lives. They understand the dangers of the internet. Pupils consider that special events such as health and safety week and the visit of the 'life caravan', that gives them more information on healthy living, are crucial to their full understanding of how to look after themselves. The support that staff provide is appreciated by pupils who were very clear that they could approach staff with any worries.
- Pupils who spoke to the inspectors were very proud of their school and provided this quotation, 'We like school because staff keep us safe; teachers are kind and every day includes new learning.'

The quality of teaching **is good**

- With the stability in staffing and new appointments has come security in teaching. Pupils' work and the school's data on the progress of pupils indicate that good teaching now extends across subjects and years.
- Most introductions to lessons engage pupil's attention quickly. Effective use of the interactive white board clarifies for pupils the purpose of the lesson. Teachers strike a good balance between listening, pupil discussions and activities. Opportunities to collaborate and take part in role play are especially helpful for pupils who are not fully confident in speaking English.
- Subjects are linked closely so that skills learnt in one lesson are practised in another. For example, pupils in Year 6 used computers to research the importance of Mayan masks used by ancient people of Central America. They showed great confidence as they brought their ideas together to produce a short drama for

the rest of the class. Skills of reading, writing and drama combined to ensure very effective learning.

- The majority of teachers provide work that targets successfully pupils' abilities. Questions are used effectively to probe, assess and consolidate learning. Teachers move swiftly around class to correct any misunderstandings and offer support. Occasionally, the match to ability is not always accurate and some pupils struggle or the most able pupils listen to instructions about work that they are confident with before they move to more challenging activities. This leads to pupils not always making as much progress as possible.
- The teaching of mathematics is good and based on teachers' secure subject knowledge. Lively opening activities including rhymes and actions aid the younger pupils to learn numbers and multiplication tables. Older ones are challenged to explain their methods so that they grow in confidence to apply their skills.
- Improvements in the teaching of phonics have raised attainment in reading. Teaching is successful and includes daily sessions when pupils share a book or carry out another reading activity. At times, in these sessions and in other activities, not enough attention is given to ensuring pupils fully understand the meaning of the words or text. This leads to confusion for some pupils as they struggle to fully comprehend what they are reading.
- Writing is taught well and examples of work from older pupils show the impact of the variety of approaches and topics teachers employ to capture pupils' interest. Pupils now use language more imaginatively with a good range of exciting words.
- Teaching for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs is effective. They often benefit from the support of additional trained staff who are skilled in meeting their specific needs. The focus is clearly on inclusion with pupils following the same topic but more at their level. When this is not possible practical equipment and activities are used that are exciting and close gaps in their learning.
- Marking has improved since the previous inspection. There is a clear policy to guide teachers and examples of excellent practice are evident in books when pupils respond in detail to teachers' comments. The changes in staff mean this practice, however, is not always consistent. Although teachers nearly always add a comment, the expectation of a response is not always evident so pupils do not always learn from their mistakes especially their incorrect spellings.
- Pupils identify homework is regular and often interesting. They enjoy making models as part of a topic or the opportunity to become entrepreneurs by coming up with their own ideas to raise funds.

The achievement of pupils is good

- The results of national tests at the end of Years 2 and 6 are indicators of the rising trend in school. Pupils now make consistently good progress from their individual starting points.
- Pupils often start in Year 1 with attainment lower than what is typical for their age. In the past attainment has not been high enough but this is no longer the case. Improved teaching and support from trained staff ensure pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1. Attainment has risen year on year and is now securely in line with what is expected for this age in reading, writing and mathematics. Current data and observations in pupils' books show this continues to be the case.
- The results of the national screening check in Year 1 were below average in 2014 but are rising this year. A high proportion of pupils are successful when they resit the assessment in Year 2.
- Progress is good in Key Stage 2 with examples of pupils making very good progress in some years. Again a rise is evident in the results of national tests and in 2014 these were creeping up to above the national average in writing and pupils were highly successful in their English grammar, punctuation and spelling assessment. Current attainment is broadly average and rising especially in reading and aspects of writing. In reading, there is a rise in the proportion of pupils working at the level expected for their age.
- Regular sessions on calculations have raised pupils' confidence in mathematics. Pupils now have a bank of skills to apply when solving problems.
- In Year 6, pupils' basic skills in writing continue to be accurate and many write well-organised stories using paragraphs accurately to structure their work. Spelling is not as accurate lower down the school although pupils make good attempts at difficult words using their improving skills in phonics.
- Pupils who read to inspectors enjoyed their books and older pupils had favourite authors and could explain what made a story interesting for them. At times, pupils read the words correctly but questioning revealed a lack of clear understanding of some of the words in books and instructions. Older pupils are not fully confident in inferring what the author means when the text is less straightforward.
- The most able pupils make good progress overall and evidence points to some pupils making excellent progress in Year 6 being on track to reach the high Level 6. At times, in some lessons tasks are not sufficiently challenging or pupils take part in easier tasks before getting to work that extends their skills.

This slows down the rate of their learning.

- Disadvantaged pupils flourish in the caring atmosphere in this school. The pupil premium is used effectively to ensure disadvantaged pupils receive the help needed. They make good progress compared with national expectations of progress and the progress of other pupils in school. In 2014, on average disadvantaged pupils were behind non-disadvantaged pupils in school and other pupils nationally by two and a half terms in mathematics and writing. In reading, disadvantaged pupils were behind non-disadvantaged pupils in school by one and a half terms and just over two terms behind when compared to other pupils nationally. The additional support is ensuring the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils is closing.
- Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because of effective assessment procedures that identify those needing help at an early stage. Support fully meets the needs of these pupils and often includes more practical activities, such as putting pegs in a board to calculate how to add different groups of numbers. Pupils with very specific needs, frequently social as well as academic, often make excellent progress because of the patient support and positive relationships established with their adult helpers.
- Although for the majority of pupils in the school English is believed not to be their first language, not all need support because they are confident speakers of English. However, staff are very aware that at times these pupils and those who are new to English need help. The use of rhymes and symbols representing the different methods of calculations in mathematics, and drama and debate in English ensure pupils of all levels of speaking English make good progress.

The early years provision

is good

- Children start school with attainment that is generally lower than what is typical for their age especially in their wider knowledge of the world and aspects of communication. Many do not have English as their first language and take a while to settle and gain confidence in their own skills. Caring staff quickly establish warm relationships that enable children to make good progress. A growing number of children reach the level that is typical for their age but overall children still have a way to go to be fully prepared for Year 1 especially in writing.
- Teaching is effective and provides a wealth of experiences for children. During the inspection the focus was on China and an amazing 'dragon' moving around the room captured children's imagination. They tasted Chinese food and these activities contributed to the good progress made in learning about the world beyond their locality. Children have many opportunities to attempt early writing and practise their emerging skills of phonics.
- Attractive resources encourage children to be creative as seen when making lanterns. At times, too many tasks are led by staff and so children do not have many opportunities to select their own activity. However, the support effectively extends children's vocabulary especially in the role-play cafe. The outdoor area is used well but the space is rather overcrowded with equipment, some of which is not as attractive as that found indoors.
- Organisation is good. Secure routines are promptly established so that children feel safe. They grow in confidence to approach staff and say they would tell a teacher if they had a problem. Behaviour is good and pupils play happily together, share resources and are eager to learn.
- A new leader has recently been appointed and effective changes are being established to improve progress including the teaching of phonics. Assessment is in place and action is taken to ensure children of all abilities receive the support needed to enable them to make good progress. Partnerships with parents are being extended with a home visit before children start school and workshops including the teaching of phonics.

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	119439
Local authority	Blackburn
Inspection number	453758

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	453
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Duckworth
Headteacher	Jacquelyn Young
Date of previous school inspection	20 March 2013
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