

Palm Tree School

Oakenhurst Road, Blackburn, Lancashire BB2 1SN

Inspection dates 7–9 October 2015

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for children and pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school's values of self-discipline, compassion and mutual respect for all people are demonstrated in the work of leaders and others.
- The school's arrangements to safeguard pupils are effective. These include working closely with external partners to help staff ensure that any risks of radicalisation or extremism are reduced.
- Pupils enjoy a wide range of activities and experiences which promote their understanding and tolerance of others.
- Pupils feel safe in school and behave very well.
- Relationships within the school community are positive.
- Teachers and other adults make sure that pupils experience effective teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders ensure that training and checks on teachers' work help them to develop their teaching skills. Over time, teaching has improved.
- Pupils make good progress. This allows Year 6 pupils to reach standards which are typically at least as good as seen nationally.
- The early years provision is effective. It helps children to gain the skills and knowledge they need to successfully move to Key Stage 1.
- The governing body provides challenge and support to the headteacher and teachers. Governors know about pupils' outcomes and teachers' effectiveness.
- Leaders have ensured that the independent school standards are met, despite the constraints of limited funding.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some remedial work had to be carried out on the school premises during the inspection to ensure that the independent school standards were met. This aspect of the school's work means that the personal development and welfare of pupils, requires improvement.
- The coordination of the work of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is not given a sufficiently high priority.
- Teachers' written feedback to pupils varies in its quality and effectiveness.
- The school's provision for two-year-olds does not always reflect these children's particular needs.
- Some policies do not accurately define the school's work.
- The website does not work well as a tool for communication with parents and others.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teachers' written feedback to pupils so that it better supports their learning.
- Ensure that resources are used in ways which:
 - allow for effective provision for different groups of pupils including those with special educational needs
 - provide for the best possible use of the website to communicate with the wider community
 - identify and address continuing maintenance needs.
- Review the school's policies to ensure these accurately reflect and shape its work.
- Use the growing experience of working with two-year-old children to ensure that activities meet even more closely their learning needs.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The school's values are clearly displayed in the entrance of the main school site. These include 'self-discipline, compassion and mutual respect for all people' and are linked to 'the Muslim faith and our British society'. The setting out of these principles for pupils, staff and visitors as they enter is just one indication of leaders' commitment to ensuring the school is open, welcoming and actively promotes fundamental British values. The school has a positive ethos which demonstrates fairness and equality.
- Leaders are ambitious for the school and its children and pupils. The move to the new building at the start of this year has been successful in improving the learning facilities for pupils. Leaders consulted with parents to determine the best location for the nursery, which led to the early years provision remaining at the original site. Leaders have started to plan for the opening of a nursery class on the main site and their longer term aim of applying to become a free school continues.
- Leaders have high expectations of staff. This is demonstrated by their systematic but supportive approach when checking teachers' work and the mentoring and training provided to help teaching improve. Leaders identify that teachers use more varied teaching techniques as a result of the training offered and that this has improved teaching. Similarly, pupils know that they are expected to try hard and behave well, which was confirmed during the inspection.
- The subjects offered follow the National Curriculum. This gives pupils opportunities to develop broad knowledge, although there is less emphasis on some aspects of creative and artistic education. Less time is spent on learning music than in many other schools. Where opportunities to include music in learning arise these are taken, for example, in the frequent use of counting songs and rhymes in the early years. Drama is included, for example, in role plays in assemblies.
- Pupils' overall experience is enriched through opportunities to visit and learn from and about others. For example, the school is building on an established link with a local special school, serving pupils with disabilities. In addition, following an initiative by the school council, pupils visit a local food bank with links to a Christian Church. In the recent past, the headteacher attended a royal garden party in recognition of her work to support community cohesion, and a pupil presented a posy to the Queen at the Maundy Ceremony in Blackburn in 2014. All these experiences are recognised and celebrated as part of pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- School policies are frequently based on models from other schools. At the time of the inspection, some had not been updated to match the precise approach taken at Palm Tree School.
- Leaders and governors are determined that the school should meet the requirements of the independent school standards. This is made harder because of the limited resources. A very small number of standards relating to the premises were not met at the start of the inspection. The necessary maintenance was very quickly rectified to ensure that the independent school standards were met.
- The questionnaires completed by staff and parents indicate very high levels of satisfaction with the school and its leadership. This includes the communication school has with parents. However, the inspector found that there were missed opportunities to develop this because the website is difficult to access and parts of it are incomplete or out of date.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The small governing body includes the proprietor, the headteacher and two other governors.
 - Publicly available information indicates that the Gt Foundation is the proprietor; the inspector was informed by the school that the proprietor has changed and there is now a sole proprietor.
 - The governing body meets at least once a month and includes reviews of pupils' outcomes and teachers' effectiveness in its work.
 - Governors are well briefed and know the school well. The governing body uses its discussions to challenge the headteacher.
 - The governing body is very aware of the limited resources available to the school. It has managed these so that Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils are now well-established in their new premises. There are plans to improve the facilities still further, for example, by installing improved computer resources.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school's child protection policy is detailed and rigorously implemented. The arrangements include the school's work to reduce any risk of radicalisation or extremism which pupils may face. Pupils' safety, in this respect, is enhanced by leaders' other thorough work, for example, in the careful checking of any visitors who come into school to talk to pupils. School leaders work in close partnership with the local authority and, where necessary, the police to ensure that

pupils are properly protected.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- The teaching pupils receive allows them to make good progress and attain high standards.
- School records indicate that, over time, teaching has improved.
- The work of teachers is supported well by other adults including trainees and parent volunteers. This allows work to be matched to pupils' needs.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils. They use well-understood systems of rewards to make sure pupils work hard. Pupils quickly settle to their work at the start of lessons and when changing activities during lessons.
- The small class sizes mean that teachers know the pupils very well. Teachers are able to provide frequent verbal feedback which supports learning. The inspector saw Year 1 and 2 pupils rapidly developing their writing as a result of the teacher's skilful use of a sample of a pupils' work to explain what she expected.
- In some classes, the opportunities provided by written feedback are not well used. When this happens, teachers' written comments do not lead to improvement over time. This is particularly the case when teachers' own writing is too untidy to model good writing habits for pupils. When this occurs, pupils' poor presentation and untidiness is not challenged.
- There is a planned programme of frequent homework. The pupils spoken to by the inspector said that they are set the right amount of homework and most parents who responded to the questionnaires agreed.
- Teachers use information about pupils' starting points to set demanding targets for learning. They then track how well pupils are doing. If pupils show signs of falling behind, teachers adjust pupils' work to help them to learn more quickly.
- The school uses the National Curriculum tests and teacher assessments with Year 6 pupils for mathematics, reading, writing, and grammar, punctuation and spelling. This allows comparison with other pupils nationally. In addition, teachers use the optional tests which have been available for Years 3, 4 and 5 in order to confirm how well younger pupils are doing.
- The new building has plenty of space which has allowed a library to be set up. This contains a wide range of suitable books which pupils say they enjoy reading. The teaching of reading skills to younger pupils, including letters and the sounds they make, is effective.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **requires improvement**

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- There are well-established systems for ensuring pupils' safety, including risk assessment for activities in and out of school, checks on fire safety and good provision of first aid facilities. However, some necessary maintenance tasks were identified by the inspector. These mainly concerned the outdoor area and playground at the old school site. The inspector saw close supervision of children using these spaces confirming that children are well looked after. However, the improvements, which were carried out quickly during the inspection, mean that they are now even more secure. It is important that the school identifies and resolves swiftly any future maintenance needs.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school. Both buildings are securely fenced and there is good supervision.
- The pupils who talked with the inspector said that people get on really well and that there is no bullying of any kind. Pupils are taught that respect for other people, whoever they are, good manners and helping others are very important.
- Pupils are confident and articulate and use these skills when talking with visitors.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are very considerate of each other in class and around the school. They help each other learn and play together well. They say that some may occasionally fidget in lessons but that 'big things like someone swearing' do not happen. They confirmed that they know about the school's system for

following up any significant behaviour incidents, but were keen to point out that it is 'just in case'.

- They respond quickly to teachers' instructions and are willing to share their work and ideas with others.
- Pupils are very keen to learn. The inspector saw pupils in Years 1 and 2 at the start of a lesson immediately continuing their writing from the previous lesson with little prompting from their teacher. In fact, they were so enthusiastic it was something of a challenge for the teacher to move them from this to the next activity.
- Pupils' punctuality is good. However, their attendance is lower than that seen nationally. Nevertheless, the school ensures that there is immediate contact with parents if pupils have unexplained absences and good attendance is rewarded.

Outcomes for children and pupils are good

- The early years provision prepares pupils well for the start of Year 1. Pupils' starting points typically match those seen in other schools. Pupils make good progress and leave the school with attainment which at least matches that seen nationally.
- The small sizes of the year groups mean that comparing information about groups of pupils' progress from different starting points to national figures does not provide useful or reliable information. The schools' own tracking shows that individual pupils make strong progress which matches or exceeds that expected nationally, in English and mathematics.
- The school has identified that where additional support is available, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make similar progress to others. When this is not the case, learning for these pupils slows. The school recognises the need to provide the best possible planning and support for all pupils. However, these arrangements are currently being developed for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.
- The school provides additional teaching to help pupils who may be falling behind in English and mathematics. This helps to ensure that, over their time in the school, pupils achieve well.
- The inspector saw effective additional support being provided for pupils at an early stage of learning English. This helped them to be fully included in the learning of the class.
- The breadth of subjects offered by the school means that pupils make progress across the important aspects of learning. Their learning in Islamic Studies includes developing understanding of other faiths and how they relate to Islam. This is exemplified by a poster in the school foyer comparing the Muslim, Christian and Jewish understanding of Jesus.
- The interesting additional activities and visits provided by the school for all pupils also contribute to their wider learning. This is particularly so for the most able, where joint work with two other local primary schools helps them to make even faster progress. Pupils' academic, sporting and creative talents are regularly celebrated including in an annual 'Kids got Talent' event.
- Effective partnerships with secondary schools are used to help leaving Year 6 pupils to quickly settle into their new schools. Leaders follow up ex-pupils' long-term progress and use this to understand how they can help current pupils.

Early years provision is good

- The separate location of the early years provision requires it to operate with independence from the main school. The early years manager is part of the school's senior leadership team which ensures that the school's early years work is given an equal priority to other aspects. The early years manager leads a small team of permanent staff, which is extended by the use of trainees.
- All the independent school standards are met in relation to the early years provision. However, work had to be completed during the inspection to ensure that maintenance of the site was fully up to date.
- The early years provision is housed in adjoining ground floor rooms of the previous school building. Arrangements are made to ensure that children have no access to unused rooms and the other floors of the building. There is easy access to a small area for learning outdoors. A large playground is also available. All inside and outside areas are well supervised by staff. Children are looked after well and are safe.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception are able to experience a range of learning and play activities. These are balanced between those which the staff lead and those which the children choose for

themselves. Children's learning is drawn together by good teaching in the staff-led activities. These include singing and rhymes which helps to make learning memorable. Staff talk to children frequently which helps to develop their language skills. These conversations are less focused on learning when the children are using the outside area which means that opportunities to develop children's thinking are missed.

- Children enter the early years with skills which are broadly typical for their age. By the time they leave Reception, they are well prepared for Key Stage 1.
- Children's learning is carefully tracked by staff. Staff members' good knowledge of each child and their progress is used to shape learning activities. For example, the inspector saw the Reception teacher working with children to develop the idea about 'longer' and 'shorter'. The teacher used the same resources and a similar activity but she carefully adapted it to match the learning of the different children. This helped children at different stages in their learning to develop their ideas.
- The school has accepted two-year-olds from September 2015. One two-year-old attends for morning sessions and seven for afternoon sessions. While this development is at an early stage, leaders have not fully reviewed the nursery's established systems and, where necessary, made adjustments. This makes it harder for them to ensure that the different learning needs of these younger children are met as well as possible.
- There are good systems to involve parents in their children's learning. These include shared journals which track children's learning and well-planned homework activities for parents who wish to share in these with their children.
- The school works closely with the local authority and other schools to check that members of staff are accurately assessing children's learning. Leaders arrange for visits to other settings to observe and learn from effective practice elsewhere. This allows members of staff to continue to be up to date in their approach.

School details

Unique reference number	131983
Inspection number	10007695
DfE registration number	889/6006
Type of school	Muslim nursery and primary school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	65
Number of part time pupils	25
Proprietor	Muhammed Idrees
Chair	Muhammed Idrees
Headteacher	Noreen Hameed
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,580
Telephone number	01254 264254
Website	www.palmtreeschool.org
Email address	palmtreeschool@yahoo.co.uk

Information about this school

- Palm Tree School opened in September 1999 as Al-Asr Primary School. It changed its name to Palm Tree School in September 2012 indicating that it no longer had formal links with the previously associated Al-Asr Mosque. The trustees of the mosque remain the landlords of the Nursery and Reception building.
- The school states that its aim is 'to provide a healthy learning environment in which the children feel comfortable and secure. A place where:
 - children advance in self-discipline and good manners as espoused by the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him)
 - children can build on and extend their knowledge and support and broaden their experience of the world, within the school and the community with parental support through a working partnership of home and school
 - children develop respect and understanding for each other within our school, local communities and the wider world
 - children can develop lively and enquiring minds and work for academic excellence in a balanced atmosphere, musing the National Curriculum.'
- The school is registered for up to 123 pupils.
- At the time of the inspection, the school had eight two-year-olds attending part time. The school has not received written confirmation or approval from the Department for Education for the change in age-range.
- One pupil has a statement of educational needs.
- All pupils come from Muslim families. They have a range of different ethnic and linguistic heritages. A minority of pupils speak English as a second language, although few are at an early stage of learning English.
- The school has two sites. Pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 moved to new premises in January 2015, with the Nursery and Reception classes remaining in the school's previous building. The two sites are about one mile apart.
- The school was previously inspected by the Bridge Schools inspectorate on 29 June–2 July 2015. The

most recent visit by Ofsted was to undertake an emergency inspection on 15 October 2014.

- The school has a sole proprietor.

Information about this inspection

- Her Majesty's Inspector observed teaching in lessons. One observation was conducted jointly with a teacher, who is also the teaching and learning mentor. The inspector also observed an assembly.
- The inspector toured both of the school's sites.
- The behaviour of pupils was observed throughout the school day.
- The inspector held discussions with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, early years manager and other members of staff. He met formally with a group of pupils and had informal conversations with others. He had a telephone conversation with a governor.
- There were 20 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View. The inspector also reviewed the responses made by 55 parents to a recent school survey. Questionnaires returned by 13 members of staff were also considered.
- School policies and other documentation provided by the school were examined to check compliance with the independent school standards and to provide other inspection evidence. Records, including those relating to safeguarding, attendance and behaviour, were also reviewed.
- The school's information on pupils' progress and attainment was considered.
- The inspector examined pupils' exercise books.

Inspection team

David Selby, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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