

Avondale Primary School

Durham Road, Darwen, BB3 1NN

Inspection dates

10–11 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not consistently good across the school. In some lessons work that is planned for pupils, particularly the most able, does not challenge them sufficiently.
- The progress of current pupils in the school is not consistently good in all subjects. Too few pupils make enough progress to achieve the higher levels in reading and mathematics by the time they leave the school.
- In 2015 too few disadvantaged pupils made the progress expected of them in mathematics.
- Governors are not provided with sufficient information throughout the year to enable them to ask challenging questions about the impact of leaders' actions.
- Governors do not robustly check to ensure that the school has carried out its statutory duties in relation to safeguarding pupils.
- Middle leaders do not play a fully effective role in school improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders' actions to tackle historical underperformance in the early years and Key Stage 1 have been effective at rapidly improving standards.
- The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding well. The teaching of French is a significant strength.
- Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school and feel safe. They attend school regularly and attendance is above the national average.
- Disabled pupils and those with special education needs achieve well in all subjects.
- Children get off to a good start on their school journey in the early years and are well prepared to move into Key Stage 1.
- The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) is effective in the early years and Key Stage 1.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - making sure that governors are provided with the information they require to regularly and robustly challenge school leaders, holding them stringently to account for the impact of their actions
 - ensuring that governors check that the school has carried out its statutory responsibilities in relation to safeguarding
 - building upon the success of improving teaching, learning and assessment in the early years and Key Stage 1, so that the quality of teaching is consistently strong across the whole school
 - ensuring that middle leaders play a full role in checking the quality of teaching and pupil outcomes and plan effective actions to support school improvement.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - making sure that all teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve and consequently provide appropriate challenge for all groups.
- Improve pupil outcomes by:
 - ensuring that a greater proportion of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve the higher levels in reading and mathematics by the time they leave the school
 - making sure that pupil premium funding is used effectively to narrow the achievement gap for disadvantaged pupils to other pupils nationally and other pupils within the school by the time they leave Key Stage 2.

An external review of governance should be undertaken so that this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, has taken effective action to tackle historically low achievement in the early years and in Key Stage 1. As a result, outcomes for younger pupils in the school improved rapidly in 2015. However, leaders' actions have not been fully successful in securing consistently good teaching across the whole school. As a result, the achievement of some groups of pupils, including the disadvantaged and most able, is not as strong as it could be.
- Leaders place a high priority on training for all staff. Teaching assistants, for example, have regular opportunities to meet or attend courses to enhance their skills. Some teachers also have the opportunity to observe one another and state that this contributes to them improving their practice.
- Middle leaders are committed to playing their part in school improvement. However, some leaders do not have a fully accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of their subjects. This is because they do not undertake frequent checks on the quality of pupils' work or visit lessons regularly to observe teaching. As a result, plans to improve mathematics and English do not get to the heart of the matter of exactly what is required to improve teaching. Furthermore, leaders are not able to judge the success of the actions they take, as plans do not make clear what success should look like, or when it will be achieved.
- Systems to manage the performance of teachers and teaching assistants are well established. Successful teaching is recognised and suitably rewarded. Where teachers do not meet the targets set of them, support and training is put in place.
- A rich and exciting curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding well. Pupils' cultural understanding, for example, was recently developed strongly through the celebration of World Languages Day in September. Pupils sent postcards to another local school, sharing their 'good news' about their learning of the French language.
- Social skills are developed effectively through the strong community aspect of the school curriculum. For example, pupils collect food for a food bank and raise money for a range of charities.
- British values are promoted well. A poignant Remembrance assembly, led by Year 6 pupils, strongly demonstrated a deep understanding of the sacrifices that members of the armed forces have made in the past and how these relate to freedom and liberty. Pupils' exemplary observance of a period of silence typified their respect of others seen throughout the inspection.
- Leaders have used pupil premium funding effectively to ensure that pupils build the skills and knowledge that they need to close achievement gaps as early as possible in the school, for instance by increasing the number of teachers across the early years and Key Stage 1. As a result, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils leaving Key Stage 1 improved in 2015. The impact on improving outcomes for older pupils has been less effective, however, particularly for the most-able disadvantaged pupils. Few pupils from this group left the school in 2015 with higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics. The achievement gap to other pupils nationally widened.
- Sports funding is used to good effect by the school. Adults have enhanced their teaching skills, for instance in gymnastics and dance. Furthermore, greater numbers of pupils now take part in competitive sport. The school cricket team qualified for regional finals in the summer term, while the boccia team has experienced recent success in a local schools competition.
- The provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is effectively led by two members of staff. They ensure that teaching assistants are appropriately trained so that they have the skills required to support pupils' specific needs. Close links with parents and a holistic approach to overcoming barriers to learning contribute well to the strong progress that this group of pupils make.
- **The governance of the school**
 - governors do not ask enough probing questions about the achievement of all pupils across the school. This is because they rely too heavily on information provided by the headteacher in the autumn term and do not request enough information about pupils other than those at the end of key stages
 - governors have not effectively shone a spotlight on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. They do not have a clear understanding of how pupil premium funding is spent and do not robustly check that it is making a difference in closing the gaps to other pupils
 - safeguarding at the school is effective. However, governors do not ask pertinent questions to hold leaders to account to ensure that statutory duties have been carried out, for instance to ensure that all checks on adults have been carried out to make sure they have been cleared to work with children

- despite the weakness in the level of challenge provided, it is clear that governors are passionate about the school. When provided with useful information they ask probing questions of leaders that show they are ambitious for pupils. They have managed school finances astutely, enabling the school to employ extra staff that have had a positive impact on achievement in the early years and Key Stage 1.
- The arrangements to keep pupils safe (safeguarding) are effective. The headteacher ensures that all adults receive appropriate training to ensure that they feel confident and have the skills to tackle issues such as homophobic bullying or recognise the signs of child sexual exploitation. Clear procedures are in place for adults to report any safeguarding concerns, which are robustly followed up by the pupil well-being co-ordinator. Checks on the suitability of adults to work with children meet statutory requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not consistently strong across the school. In some classes, particularly in Key Stage 2, teachers do not use assessment effectively to plan work that suitably challenges all groups of pupils. Learning for most-able pupils, in some classes, falters as teachers do not expect enough of them.
- Mostly teachers use questioning well to gauge understanding and promote learning. In a Reception class, for example, the class teacher skilfully supported children to reorder numbers on a number line by prompting and questioning that ensured progress was being made.
- Gaps in pupils' basic mathematical skills, such as multiplication tables, are being plugged through daily lessons.
- Weaknesses in teaching are not reflected in all classes or all subjects. Strong subject knowledge in subjects such as French, for instance, contributes to pupils making good progress. In a Year 4 lesson for example, pupils' learning leapt forward at pace because the specialist language teacher had high expectations of what pupils could achieve. As a result, pupils were able to construct complex sentences enthusiastically and successfully about their family.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are stronger in Key Stage 1 and the early years. Teachers use what they know about pupils to plan lessons that move learning on rapidly. For example, in a Year 2 computing lesson, pupils made strong progress, as the activity to programme 'bee-bots' challenged and enthused all groups of pupils.
- Senior leaders' focus on improving the quality of the teaching of phonics is reaping rewards. Teachers plan stimulating lessons that move learning forward effectively. In a Year 1 lesson, for example, pupils thoroughly enjoyed embedding their knowledge through 'phonics aerobics'. Pupils who read to inspectors were able to use their phonics skills to read challenging words and were able to answer questions about the books they were reading.
- Activities observed during 'guided reading' lessons are helping pupils to become more confident in using inference and deduction skills.
- The use of a specialist reading recovery teacher to support pupils who find reading difficult is having a positive impact and helping pupils to make progress in improving their reading skills.
- Positive relationships between adults and pupils have been fostered well across the school. In most lessons success is celebrated and pupils are encouraged to volunteer their answers without fear of failure. As a result, pupils are confident and have developed the skills that they need to persevere when faced with challenging tasks.
- Teaching assistants are used well in most classes. The investment leaders have made in their training is clear to see, as the support that they give to pupils of all abilities contributes to effective learning during lessons.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupil's personal development and welfare is good. Pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they enjoy coming to school. Indeed, it is a feature of the school that the vast majority of pupils go about their day with a smile on their face.
- Pupils feel safe. Those pupils that completed an online questionnaire and those who spoke to inspectors say that name-calling or bullying is rare. Pupils trust their teachers and have the utmost confidence that any issues will be sorted out quickly. Worry boxes in each classroom ensure that pupils can share their problems, even if they are less confident about speaking directly to an adult.

- The school curriculum contributes strongly to pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe. In Year 4, for example, pupils learn about how to resist pressure to do something that may be dangerous or that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Pupils speak highly of the support that they receive from the pupil well-being co-ordinator. Her work to support those experiencing social or emotional challenges, or who just want a quiet chat to resolve a problem, is highly valued and contributes strongly to pupils' well-being across the school.
- Pupil play leaders are proud of the work they undertake to support younger children. They willingly volunteer at lunchtime to play with pupils from Key Stage 1 to make sure that no one is left out and that games are fun.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Positive attitudes toward their learning mean that, despite shortcomings in the quality of teaching in some classes, pupils are keen to do their best.
- A clear, whole-school behaviour system helps pupils to understand what is expected of them inside and outside of the classroom. Well-established routines and high expectations of behaviour in most classes ensure that pupils respond quickly to teachers' instructions. Incidents of low-level disruption are rare, other than in lessons where teaching fails to grab pupils' interest.
- Pupils are extremely proud of their school, with almost every pupil who replied to the Ofsted online questionnaire stating that they would recommend it to a friend. 'We don't want to leave this school' is a typical statement that exemplifies the high esteem that older pupils hold their school in.
- Respect and tolerance is tangible throughout the school. Pupils get along inside the classroom and on the playground irrespective of their background, beliefs or gender. Pupils warmly welcome visitors to their school and their polite conversations with inspectors epitomise their exemplary manners towards adults and one another.
- Pupils value their education. As a result, attendance is above the national average and very few pupils miss school often. The very well attended before- and after-school club further supports pupils to attend school regularly and punctually.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- The progress that current pupils make across the school is inconsistent. Evidence in pupils' books shows that in a number of classes pupils are not making the progress they could. This is because work that is set does not sufficiently challenge all groups of pupils, particularly the most able. Consequently, the proportion of pupils who left school in 2015 achieving higher levels in reading and mathematics was significantly below that seen nationally.
- In the past, outcomes for pupils in the early years and at Key Stage 1 have been well below those seen nationally. However, senior leaders' actions resulted in rapid improvements in 2015 that are being sustained for current pupils. Overall achievement at the end of Key Stage 1 was significantly above that seen nationally in 2015.
- Improvements in the quality of the teaching of phonics resulted in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in the phonics screening test improving sharply, so that in 2015 it was above the national average. Leaders have not rested on their laurels and a continued focus on this area has ensured that achievement continues to go from strength to strength.
- A sustained focus on writing in 2015 ensured that achievement improved significantly from that seen in 2014, so that pupils left the school with achievement above the national average.
- Current writing books show that pupils' achievement across the school is variable and not consistently good. In some classes, progress is stronger because teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and use feedback effectively to ensure that pupils know what to do to improve their work. In other classes feedback is less effective as it does not tackle errors in basic skills.
- The proportion of pupils leaving the school with achievement in the basic skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar at the expected level was significantly below the national average in 2015.
- Disadvantaged pupils made expected and above expected progress in reading that was in line with that seen nationally and above that seen nationally in writing in 2015. However, in mathematics very few disadvantaged pupils made more than the progress expected of them. Furthermore, the overall

achievement gap for pupils leaving the school widened in 2015.

- Pupils' mathematics books and observations of lessons show that in some classes progress for some pupils, particularly the more able, is not as strong as it could be. This is because activities are not always pitched at the right level to challenge this group of pupils adequately. Furthermore, pupils are not currently given enough opportunities to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills to deepen their mathematical understanding. As a result, too few pupils made more than the progress expected of them in 2015.
- Lower-attaining pupils make good progress across the school in all subjects, as do disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. This is because leaders ensure that adults who work with this group of pupils are well trained and consequently have the necessary skills to promote learning effectively. Furthermore, the impact of support is monitored closely and tailored to ensure that it meets the specific needs of each pupil.
- Pupils' achievement in other subjects such as physical education, music and computing is good. Achievement is further enhanced through the provision of a range of extra-curricular activities such as choir and pupils becoming 'digital leaders'.

Early years provision

is good

- The early years provision is a strength of the school. Strong links with parents and the nurseries that children attend before joining the school ensure that teachers are able to plan for the needs of children from the moment they start their school life. As a result, children get off to a flying start in the early years and are well prepared to move into Key Stage 1.
- All groups of children make strong progress from their starting points that are generally typical for their age. This is because teachers have high expectations of what they can achieve and plan activities that match their needs and ignite their interests. Children's counting and fine motor skills were developed effectively for example, when they used Play-Doh and counting sticks to make a hedgehog.
- Adults support learning well. Skilful use of open-ended questions act as prompts for children to develop their language and communication skills, as well as promoting confidence and self-esteem. Children were able to confidently explain and demonstrate how to be a good counter, in a mathematics activity for example, because adults asked probing questions to develop thinking skills.
- Children get along with one another well and work collaboratively on learning activities. For instance, children were observed during the inspection helping each other and discussing the correct answer during a game where they rolled a dice and placed a beanbag on a corresponding number.
- Children's writing in the early years shows that they are making good progress. Attention is paid to correctly forming letters and writing sentences with capital letters, full stops and finger spaces. In mathematics, children's progress is also strong, as they are able to develop their skills and understanding through investigation and exploration of shape, space and measure as well as number.
- Leadership and management of the early years are good. A strong understanding of pupils and their needs, based on comprehensive checks on what children can do when they join Reception, ensures that teachers are able to plan effectively for all groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, and promote good progress.
- Children are well supervised and procedures for keeping them safe are effective.
- Strong links with parents, developed effectively, for example through workshops on helping children to read, support learning at home as well as in school.

School details

Unique reference number	119294
Local authority	Blackburn and Darwen
Inspection number	10000851

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	410
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Bentley
Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge	Stewart Plowes
Telephone number	01254 703449
Website	www.thelifecloud.net/schools/AvondalePrimarySchool/
Email address	avondale@blackburn.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	6–7 March 2012

Information about this school

- Avondale Primary School is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is above average (pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and those who are looked after by the local authority).
- Most pupils are from a White British heritage and most pupils speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is above the national average.
- In 2015 the school met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- There is an on-site breakfast club and after-school provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in each class of the school.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, members of staff, two representatives of the governing body and the school improvement advisor and a telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, behaviour, school improvement planning, assessment information and reports on the quality of teaching.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils informally during the school day and observed them during playtime, lunch and before and after school. They also met formally with two groups of pupils to talk about their learning and behaviour and safety.
- Inspectors listened to a number of pupils read.
- A range of pupils' books were checked.
- Inspectors spoke to a small number of parents at the start of the day. They also took account of the 42 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Inspectors also took note of the 25 responses they received to the inspection questionnaire for school staff and the 37 responses they received to the online inspection questionnaire for school pupils.
- Four further Ofsted inspectors joined the inspection at the start of the second day.

Inspection team

Martin Bell, Lead Inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ian Hardman	Her Majesty's Inspector
Stephen Rigby	Ofsted inspector
Kathleen McArthur	Ofsted inspector
Sheila O'Keeffe	Ofsted inspector
Lisa Morgan	Ofsted inspector

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