

Blacklow Brow Primary School

Tarbock Road, Huyton, Liverpool, Merseyside, L36 5XW

Inspection dates

20–21 October 2015

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

| | |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Inadequate |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Inadequate |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Requires improvement |
| Outcomes for pupils | Inadequate |
| Early Years provision | Requires improvement |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Outstanding |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- The school is poorly led. Leaders lack vision, teachers lack direction and a culture of complacency prevails.
- Leaders are not aware of what changes need to take place to improve learning for pupils. Checks on teaching and teachers' performance are not penetrating enough. Funding is not well targeted where there is greatest need.
- The leadership of subjects, including mathematics, English and science is ineffective and does not support teachers or promote good learning.
- Standards have dipped. In 2014, there were concerns with performance in Key Stage 2. While outcomes at the end of Key Stage 2 improved slightly this year, there was a significant dip in attainment in Key Stage 1.
- Overall, teachers have low expectations of pupils. Disadvantaged and more-able pupils do not make the progress they should and there are on-going weaknesses in mathematics.
- The curriculum is disorganised and does not meet pupils' needs.
- Too much teaching lacks conviction. Lessons follow a leisurely pace and there is a lack of challenge, which does not engage pupils' interest.
- Too many lessons do not captivate pupils' curiosity, so their attention wanders or they become passive listeners.
- Teachers have not received the training necessary to ensure that they are well prepared to teach the new National Curriculum. They lack the subject knowledge to teach all subjects well.
- Home-school partnerships are not well developed in early years.
- Attendance is not improving and remains below the national average.
- Governance is weak. Governors are not well informed and are unaware of the intrinsic weaknesses in the school. They have not challenged school leaders or held them to account.

The school has the following strengths

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and safeguarding procedures are rigorously followed.
- Pupils feel safe and are happy at the school. Vulnerable pupils are well looked after.
- Behaviour around the school is good.

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that school leaders have a well-informed strategic plan that provides clear direction for the school and will move it forward
 - ensuring that self-evaluation is based on a clear and realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This should include accurate analysis of pupils' achievement in each year group as well as the impact of actions being taken to improve outcomes for pupils
 - making sure that classroom monitoring is regular, rigorous and challenges weak practice
 - managing the performance of teachers professionally and using this process to improve the quality of the workforce
 - developing subject leaders to ensure that they are able to monitor their subjects effectively and provide relevant advice, support and resources to enable teachers to deliver the full range of subjects with increasing confidence and effectiveness
 - making sure that additional funding, to support disadvantaged pupils and to improve sport throughout the school, is well managed and spent wisely to improve provision
 - ensuring that attendance information is used more effectively to challenge lateness and frequent or unauthorised absence in order to improve attendance
 - developing more effective home-school partnerships in the early years provision to make available better information for parents about how their children are doing, so their learning can be better supported at home
 - making certain that transition arrangements meet pupils' needs better
 - ensuring that the school website meets statutory requirements and provides parents with regular and relevant information about the school and what their children are doing
 - providing relevant training for governors to enable them to fulfil their duties effectively, and ensure that they are able to challenge and hold school leaders to account with increasing confidence.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that all groups of pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and the more able, make much better progress than at present by:
 - providing appropriate quality training for all staff, to improve their practice, especially in the teaching of phonics and mathematics
 - making lessons more pacy and challenging, so they engage and stretch pupils, especially the more able
 - planning work which pupils find more interesting so as to improve their concentration and attitudes to learning
 - planning a cohesive curriculum, which meets the needs of all pupils and enables teachers to build on pupils' previous learning across the full range of subjects
 - giving pupils more opportunities to investigate and solve problems, think for themselves and write at length
 - promoting reading for pleasure more effectively by encouraging reading at home and checking on pupils' progress more frequently than at present
 - developing pupils' grammar, punctuation, spelling and vocabulary in all subjects and providing more frequent opportunities for them to respond to marking and correct their work.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of 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 is inadequate

- School leaders and teachers do not have a collective vision for the school or where it is heading. A lack of rigour is evident in how the school is being managed. This lack of direction has resulted in teachers becoming isolated and being left to their own devices. As a result, there is a lack of understanding about what should be taught, what is good teaching and learning and how weaknesses can be corrected.
- No strategic overview is in place. The school's self-evaluation identifies general issues linked to recent declines in standards at both key stages but fails to recognise much deeper concerns linked to the current needs of the pupils. The school has relied too much on its past reputation and success and has failed to move with the times.
- School leaders do not have an accurate or in-depth view of weaknesses in teaching and learning or subject leadership. Monitoring of classroom performance is cursory, infrequent and does not provide sufficient constructive feedback to enable teachers to improve their performance. Insufficient attention is being paid to the quality of work in pupils' books, the appropriateness of the resources and the work being set or the quality of teachers' subject knowledge. Consequently, most pupils are not doing as well as they should because what is being taught, and how it is taught, are not meeting their needs well enough.
- Analysis of the progress of pupils is limited mainly to outcomes at the end of each key stage and insufficient attention is paid to the progress of different groups in different classes. Information is not being used wisely to direct support, or analyse the impact of this support. The impact of funding for disadvantaged pupils is not properly analysed.
- The management of the performance of teachers is not rigorous enough because weaknesses in classroom provision are not being recognised or challenged. As a result, there is no cohesive or relevant programme of professional development that can improve classroom practice and teachers' skills. Teachers identified that they frequently choose training events that they want to attend rather than being directed to courses relevant to the needs of the school. There is little to indicate that attendance on courses results in changes in the classroom or improves the skills and performance of colleagues.
- The leadership of subjects, including English, mathematics and science, is ineffective. Subject leaders are unaware of what is being taught in classrooms other than their own because there is no formal or systematic monitoring of lessons or pupils' work. Little or no advice and support is being provided to enable teachers to implement the new National Curriculum effectively. For example, the new mathematics curriculum is not being delivered in sufficient depth, as was intended, because teachers have had insufficient appropriate training. Subject leaders are oblivious to what is going on in their subjects. They have no incentive to do so since they are not being held accountable by either senior managers or governors.
- The curriculum is poorly planned, lacks cohesion and does not meet the needs of the pupils. Teachers are provided with little guidance or direction about what they should be teaching. Pupils reported that some subjects are taught infrequently and lessons may be altered to complete other work. Insufficient time is being given to the teaching of some subjects. This weak practice is not being identified and challenged by subject leaders. Evidence in books showed that there is little evidence of continuity and progression across a whole range of subjects, apart from English and mathematics. Teaching is often not building on what pupils have learnt the previous year, and this is holding back progress, especially for the more-able pupils.
- Although pupils enjoy visits to a range of places, including for outdoor pursuits, they reported that frequency varied from class to class. Little use is made of the rich cultural and historical heritage in the Liverpool area, which could support pupils in learning about issues such as freedom, identity, human rights, discrimination and cultural change. There are few opportunities to gain a perspective on life in modern Britain beyond the immediate environment of Huyton.
- Although the caring, homely atmosphere of the school promotes pupils' moral development well, the disjointed curriculum and weak teaching provide only limited opportunities to understand different cultures in modern Britain and of British values such as democracy. For example, in a Year 5 lesson pupils were studying ancient Greece and had been taught that Athens was the cradle of democracy. When asked what this meant, they said that men had the vote but women and slaves did not. An opportunity had been missed to challenge this misconception and develop a deeper understanding of the subject.
- The school's culture strives to promote equality of opportunity. Unfortunately, the reality is that the failure to close the gap for disadvantaged pupils or provide opportunities for the most able to reach their full

potential means that these fine principles are not always put into practice.

- The additional physical education (PE) and sport premium is being used to fund coaches to improve the range and quality of PE provided, as well as extend the skills of teachers. Pupils talked enthusiastically about enjoying PE. However, the school has not monitored or analysed the extent to which this improved enthusiasm has widened participation in sports and team games.
- The school website does not meet requirements and does not present the best picture of the school to the outside world. The site has not been kept up to date, and information does not always inform parents as well as it should. For example, the latest newsletter was dated April/May 2015.
- Since the school was judged as outstanding in the last inspection, the local authority has provided limited support. However, the recent decline in results was noted and, in September, the school was identified as potentially being a coasting school. Targeted support has been offered to address weaknesses in outcomes for pupils but the school has, to date, not had time to take advantage of this offer.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - governors have not met their statutory duty and requirement to ensure the best possible education for all the children in their care. They have been dilatory in challenging school managers to ensure the maintenance of a culture of continuous improvement and success. The legacy of previous success has been squandered
 - governors acknowledge that they accepted assurances from the headteacher that came with reports and did not challenge outcomes. For example, in 2015, eight pupils resat the phonics screening test. Governors did not ask why none of these pupils had met the required standard. Equally, they were aware of the recent dip in data but did not question it. Governors have the school's best interests at heart but currently they lack the training and expertise to be effective in their roles. Although they are aware of the headline facts, they are oblivious to the underlying endemic issues which are affecting negatively on the quality of education that the pupils are receiving. Governors are unsure about how effectively additional funding to promote physical education and support disadvantaged children is being spent. They have not been actively involved in making sure that staff, other than the headteacher, only progress in salary when this is merited.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Relevant checks have been carried out for all staff and volunteers. The administration of this is rigorous. Vulnerable pupils receive very good support both internally and through links with a range of agencies. Safeguarding procedures are rigorously followed. For example, pupils' individual medical needs are well known, medicines are stored appropriately and risk assessments for visits are meticulously documented.
- The school should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate

- Far too much of the teaching is weak, inconsistent and does not meet the pupils' needs, particularly in the lower school. The fragmented and poorly planned curriculum does not enable teachers to build on what pupils have been taught in the previous year. As a result, pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- The lack of quality training, coupled to weak subject knowledge, means that teachers are not confident in delivering lessons that engage and challenge pupils. Often the resources available are not used to best advantage. In addition, the lack of guidance and support from subject leaders does not enable teachers to teach with confidence and conviction.
- Far too much teaching lacks rigour. There is an absence of challenge and too many tasks are low level, repetitive or occupy pupils rather than engage their interest. Pupils are not sufficiently encouraged to develop their deeper understanding. Higher ability pupils, in particular, are being occupied by mundane tasks and are given too few opportunities to develop their thinking and reasoning.
- In too many mathematics lessons pupils continue completing similar calculations, often getting most correct, yet they are rarely moved on to attempt more difficult tasks. There is little evidence in books that pupils are given sufficient opportunities to develop problem-solving skills.
- The teaching of phonics is especially weak. The organisation of how it is taught and the poor training teachers have had combine to ensure that pupils do not develop their sounding out and recognition of words well. Pupils' achievement in the phonics check has declined and is now below the national average.
- Pupils enjoy reading and most take reading books home. Although pupils identified that they frequently read

with their parents, they reported that adults did not always read regularly with them in school. Practice varies from class to class and is not well organised or rigorous.

- School leaders have recognised that the pace of learning in too many lessons is very leisurely, but they have not tackled this with any conviction.
- The quality of marking and feedback is best evidenced in English and mathematics books. In the main, teachers attempt to provide constructive comments for pupils. However, there is little evidence that pupils are taking notice of this advice since, often, similar errors occur later in their books. Equally, redrafting of work or correcting spellings is rare. Marking in other subjects is weaker and often consists of praise reflecting weaknesses in teachers' subject knowledge.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils' feel safe and secure in a friendly and loving environment. Most parents are fully in agreement. Relationships are positive and there is mutual respect.
- The school is good at providing for the personal needs of pupils, especially those who are vulnerable or have disabilities. Their personal welfare is a priority and is well managed by the learning mentor. Pupils are well supported both in school and by a range of outside agencies. For example, pupils are accustomed to using drop-in sessions to discuss personal problems, and sort out disputes and minor disagreements in a mature way.
- Pupils interviewed were adamant that bullying is something that very rarely happens in their school. They are aware they should not hurt others by derogatory name calling. They are confident that adults in the school deal effectively with the few incidents when these arise.
- Pupils are aware of how to stay safe online. They are very clear about what they need to do to protect themselves, including on social networking sites. They are frequently reminded in lessons and through assemblies how to stay safe.
- Pupils' general attitudes around the school and in corridors are good. Pupils are inquisitive and greet visitors politely. They stand aside and let others through doors, and there is no pushing and shoving in corridors. Older pupils enjoy opportunities to behave responsibly; for example, they marshal and chaperone younger pupils into the hall for assemblies.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Where pupils are stimulated and challenged and the most-able pupils are provided with work that stretches them, as in an effective mathematics lesson observed in Year 6, their response is positive. Unfortunately, this is the exception rather than the norm. In too many lessons where expectations are low, attention wanders and pupils become passive listeners or daydream and then find it hard to be motivated to complete work. This was very noticeable in several classes where the pace set by the teacher was too leisurely. Very little actual work was done; pupils fidgeted and distracted each other through casual conversation.
- The very short lunchtime, lasting half an hour, does not provide pupils with much opportunity to let off steam and use up some of their energy outside. Pupils, notably boys, become much more restless in the afternoons, especially in lessons where they are expected to sit for long periods on the carpet and listen to the teacher.
- Pupils' absence continues to be an issue and is above both local and national averages. Disadvantaged pupils are the most frequent absentees or are likely to be late for school. The school has not engaged effectively with parents to improve attendance. Attendance is meticulously recorded, but this information is not used to pursue those pupils who are late or frequent offenders in order to improve attendance. At present, the school has no clear strategies in place that are likely to improve attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

are inadequate

- Over the last two years, the dip in standards has caused concern.
- In 2014, the proportion of pupils achieving expected standards in the Year 6 standardised assessments fell below the national average. Although this was close to the average in reading and writing, it was below in mathematics. However, the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers was quite wide. In 2015, although there was some improvement, ongoing weaknesses in mathematics mean that standards are still below the national average and the gap for disadvantaged pupils is not closing.
- Clear targets for the improvement of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and disabilities are not set, therefore school leaders are not able to track progress effectively. Equally, the impact of interventions is not monitored or evaluated. As a result, evidence suggests that this gap will not close in the near future.
- Pupils' use of English grammar, punctuation and spelling is on ongoing problem, with standards well below the national average because this aspect is not promoted well across all subjects. Work in books shows too many pupils, in too many classes, are making frequent errors which are not being sufficiently challenged and corrected. There is a lack of opportunity for pupils to write extensively across the curriculum because low level tasks limit their responses.
- Low expectations mean that, although most pupils make expected progress, few make more than expected progress. Higher ability pupils, in particular, are underachieving. As a result, fewer than expected attain higher grades.
- In 2015, there has been a significant dip in standards at Key Stage 1. Pupils' performance in the phonics screening test continued to fall below both the local and national level, reflecting the weak teaching in this area of the school.
- Weak subject management and a fragmented and disorganised curriculum mean that progress in subjects other than English and mathematics is patchy and poor.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- Children enter early years either into the Nursery or directly into Reception class. Although they come with a wide range of backgrounds, their knowledge and skills are broadly typical for children of their age.
- From their starting points, most make steady progress towards their early learning goals. As a result, the greater majority have reached a good level of development and are ready for more formal work in Year 1. A downward trend has been arrested. Disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to their peers but there is little indication that any gaps are closing.
- Home-to-school partnerships are poorly developed. Parents are not kept aware of the next step of their child's development through their learning journeys. This inhibits the opportunity for parents to be more supportive and involved in their children's learning. Parents do not go into the Nursery at the beginning and end of the day, so opportunities to discuss their children's progress on a regular and informal basis are limited.
- The school has recently invested in its indoor and outdoor provision and these resources are of good quality. These include equipment that reflects all areas of the curriculum. During continuous provision children are well supervised. They move around with confidence, and share equipment and toys freely. They work well collaboratively and show willingness to take turns during role-play.
- Teaching is inconsistent across the early years because there is no shared view of how things should be done. Teachers tend to plan and work as individuals and not as part of a team. As a result, although there is some good practice, this is not being shared to strengthen approaches across the early years. For example, a new phonics programme has been introduced, but there has been no follow up after training to see how well or otherwise staff are delivering this programme. Equally, there is little understanding of Key Stage 1 phonics practice. Weak outcomes in the screening tests in Years 1 and 2 reflect inconsistent and poor application of the programme, including in the early years.
- Transition arrangements both into the early years and through to Year 1 remain underdeveloped. The transfer and use of information about pupils is weak. For example, the Nursery does not receive feedback and comparative data about how well their children have done by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Equally, despite the fact that the greater majority of pupils are ready for the move to more structured lessons, too many teaching sessions in Year 1 are too informally organised and do not meet pupils' needs.
- Children are well supervised and safe, and their welfare needs are well met. Relationships between adults and children are good.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 104445 |
| Local authority | Knowsley |
| Inspection number | 10002591 |

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.

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|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 258 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Graham Powell |
| Headteacher | Mrs Sheila Walmsley |
| Telephone number | 0151 477 8010 |
| Website | http://blacklowbrow.co.uk |
| Email address | blacklowbrow@knowsley.gov.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 2 October 2008 |

Information about this school

- Blacklow Brow is an over-subscribed average-sized school.
- The majority of pupils come from relatively advantaged backgrounds as seen in the low numbers of pupils entitled to free school meals.
- Nearly all the pupils are White British. There are no pupils speaking English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is low.
- Children enter Reception Class from a wide range of providers, including approximately fifty percent directly from the Nursery.
- There has been significant staff turbulence over the last couple of years with some classes being taught by temporary staff for part of the year.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for reading writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes in the school. Two of these were joint observations with the deputy headteacher in the absence of the headteacher on the second day of the inspection. Inspectors observed phonics teaching and listened to pupils read.
- On the first day, Her Majesty's Inspector conducted two learning walks through the school, accompanied by the headteacher and deputy, looking at outcomes and engagement in lessons.
- Inspectors scrutinised and evaluated pupils' work across a range of subjects, especially English, mathematics, science, history and geography.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation, including school policies, self-evaluation and procedures to safeguard pupils.
- Inspectors met with school leaders, staff, three governors and two representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors also met with three groups of pupils to discuss their work, how safe they felt and what they thought about the school. They also talked to many other pupils during lessons and around the school.
- Twenty responses were considered from the online questionnaire Parent View. Her Majesty's Inspector also talked briefly to a small number of parents who were picking up their children from the Nursey at midday and from the main school at the end of the first day.
- The headteacher was not present on the second day of the inspection. She had been granted authorised leave of absence by the governors prior to the inspection for personal reasons.

Inspection team

Leszek Iwaskow, Lead Inspector
Elizabeth Clarke
Stephen Rigby

Her Majesty's Inspector
Ofsted Inspector
Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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