

Banks Methodist School

Chapel Lane, Banks, Southport PR9 8EY

Inspection dates	6–7 July 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Outstanding leadership from the headteacher has underpinned the significant improvements that have occurred since the school's last inspection.
- Pupils' outcomes have improved considerably. From their different starting points, pupils now make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The quality of teaching is now consistently good. Skilled teachers and support staff get the best out of pupils and take good care of them.
- Vulnerable pupils' individual needs are quickly identified. This ensures that they receive the very best support available to help them learn, improve their behaviour and support them emotionally.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and protect them from harm is highly effective.
- Children in the early years get a good start to their education. They develop good attitudes to school and a love of learning.
- Pupils behave well. They get on with each other, and are polite and respectful to adults. Pupils try hard with their work because staff have helped them believe that they can achieve well.
- Pupils enjoy a good range of interesting learning experiences. The school has provided them with a firm grounding in the principles of British values, which ensures that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Governance is much improved since the previous inspection. Governors hold school leaders to account well by asking probing questions about the school's effectiveness.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The attainment of some pupils is lower than it should be because the legacy of deep-rooted historical underachievement is still evident.
- While British values are embodied within the ethos of the school, some pupils struggle to explain them.
- Not all parents are clear about the school's homework policy and their role in supporting their children's education at home.
- The restrictions of the school building prevent the best possible flow of indoor and outdoor learning for children in the early years.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue the very effective work that is being done to eradicate the legacy of underachievement in reading, writing and mathematics so that all pupils who are capable of attaining the standards expected for their age do so.
- Build on current, effective initiatives to involve parents in supporting their children's learning at home, particularly their reading, and ensure that all parents are clear about the school's policy on homework.
- Ensure that pupils have a more explicit awareness of British values.
- Develop current ideas to further improve early years provision and address, as far as possible, the restrictions to the free flow of indoor and outdoor learning posed by the building.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher is an outstanding leader who provides clear and uncompromising direction for school improvement. Weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been resolutely addressed. Improvements are widely acknowledged by staff, pupils, governors, parents and the local authority.
- The impact on pupils' academic and personal outcomes is clearly evident. Teaching is considerably better than it was at the time of the previous inspection and pupils' behaviour has improved. As a result, pupils are learning well and making good progress.
- The journey from requires improvement to good has not been straightforward. On her appointment, the headteacher's sharp insights relating to weaknesses in the school's effectiveness were not accepted by some staff and governors, and resulted in significant resignations.
- Of the staff who remained, not all were willing or able to meet the headteacher's high expectations. Others embraced opportunities to develop their practice and have become very effective and valued members of the teaching team. Weak teaching has been eradicated. New teachers' appointments have proved very successful. There is now a committed, knowledgeable and skilled staff team and morale is high.
- The headteacher's dedication to all pupils is underpinned by the belief that they deserve the best and only the best will do. This is a tangible part of the school's ethos, shared by the staff and governors.
- The teachers who now lead classes 1 and 2 are passionate about their work, dedicated to their pupils and have eagerly accepted leadership responsibilities. They lead the core subjects of English and science well, and also support aspects of safeguarding and assessment.
- The nature of a small school means that there are fewer teachers than in most primary schools to share subject leadership. However, strong collaboration ensures that good practice is continually shared. Effective links with other local schools also support improvements in subject leadership.
- Ongoing professional communication between the full staff team is one of the reasons the school runs so effectively. Everyone has a good working knowledge of the school's improvement priorities and their accountabilities in relation to these. The regular pupils' progress meetings now include support staff so that all teaching staff understand their responsibility in improving pupils' achievement.
- The headteacher swiftly recognised the need to ensure accurate assessments of pupils' achievements. Rigorous checks on assessment, both within school and with other schools, have resulted in a much clearer picture of pupils' attainment and progress than in the past.
- A good range of other checks show how well teaching and the curriculum are meeting pupils' needs and ensuring that they make good progress. They include regular visits to lessons by the headteacher, comprehensive reviews of pupils' work and discussions with them about their learning.
- This process ensures that leaders and teachers have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths. They inform the setting of school improvement priorities and staff appraisals.
- Good professional development opportunities, including valuable visits to schools, recognised for their good and outstanding provision, are provided. As a result, subject and phase expertise, for example in early years provision, has improved, as have skills, such as questioning and assessment. Staff training is well targeted to school priorities and individual staff needs.
- In particular, there has been very effective training to support staff in managing the complex behaviour of some vulnerable pupils. The comments of a small number of parents who consider that lessons are continually disrupted by these pupils are not supported by the inspection evidence.
- The redesign of the curriculum has had a positive impact on pupils' enthusiasm for learning. Interesting themes fire pupils' imagination and help them make meaningful links between learning in different subjects. Reading, writing and mathematics are taught separately and reinforced well in other subjects.
- Provision for mathematics has improved significantly and pupils are now achieving far better in this subject than in the past. Science also has a high profile and a strong investigative focus.
- Work in history, geography, art and music helps pupils to appreciate their own and other cultures, and enhances their spiritual, moral and social development. Pupils learn to speak Spanish and have regular opportunities to develop computing skills.
- Significant within this overall picture of provision is the way in which work is personalised to meet the wide and varying range of pupils' needs in each class. In this way, the school ensures that the most able pupils, lower attainers and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress.

- The additional pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils and those in local authority care is used very well to meet these pupils' academic and personal needs.
- Developing pupils spiritually, morally, socially and culturally is at the heart of the school's work. Christian values have a high profile, and pupils understand and articulate these well. Pupils learn about democracy, recognise the rule of law, appreciate individual liberty, and develop tolerance and respect for the whole range of diversity. However, some pupils have difficulty in explaining British values.
- A varied and changing range of extra-curricular activities are provided during the year. Pupils have the opportunity to suggest activities, which have included gardening, cooking and beauty, and decide on these by voting. Staff and the chair of the governing body give generously of their time to run clubs, such as football, chess and homework. There is also a weekly 'fit for life' club, financed by the additional funding the school receives to promote physical education and sport.
- This funding is used well. Specialist sports coaches are bought in to work alongside teachers, which ensures good learning for pupils and enhances teachers' skills.
- There are good links with parents. The headteacher is on hand at the start of each day and teachers are available at the end. Meetings and workshops, for example about reading and e-safety, are provided and there are regular 'bring a parent to school' days to help parents understand how various subjects are taught. Some engage well in these opportunities, but others are more reluctant.
- Leaders are keen to know parents' and pupils' views and undertake surveys to help determine these. The results of recent surveys, which used the same questions as the Ofsted surveys, were highly positive. The parent survey showed 100% satisfaction with all aspects of school life, and no parents indicated dissatisfaction in relation to any question.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance has improved significantly since the school was last inspected. The governing body now comprises governors with a variety of expertise and skills. These have been further enhanced through comprehensive training so that governors are now well equipped to undertake their responsibilities. Governors receive good information from the headteacher about the school's work. They ask probing questions about how well teaching and other aspects of provision are improving pupils' achievement, behaviour and safety. Governors understand how the additional pupil premium and sports funding are spent and the effect this is having on pupils' achievement and well-being.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The headteacher has ensured significant improvements in this area. Despite some of the challenges presented by the school site, security measures are rigorous and pupils are well supervised at all times. Safeguarding policies and procedures are also rigorous and records are meticulously kept. Staff are fully aware of their responsibilities and receive regular training to ensure that their knowledge and understanding of safeguarding and child protection remain current.
- Excellent working relationships with many professional agencies ensure that, where necessary, pupils and their families receive the expert support they need.
- The very small number of pupils who attend the before- and after-school clubs are well cared for.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The mixed-year classrooms are busy places and staff work hard to ensure that pupils of different ages and abilities are given work that interests and engages them. Ensuring that all pupils are appropriately challenged and supported is a constant focus and one which is well met.
- Teachers' expectations of behaviour are high and based on good relationships. While lessons are often lively and exciting, the calm and consistent approach of teachers and support staff, particularly in managing behaviour, ensures that learning now takes place without interruption.
- Careful organisation and effective use of the generous number of well-trained teaching assistants ensures that pupils in different year groups are taught the appropriate work for their age and are helped to make up lost ground from earlier underachievement.
- More accurate assessments have enabled teachers to identify gaps in pupils' learning from previously weak teaching and ensure that work builds effectively on what pupils already know.
- Considerable improvement has occurred in the teaching of mathematics, where pupils' understanding was previously insecure due to their limited opportunities to reason mathematically and solve problems.

- Mathematics teaching now includes a strong focus on developing pupils' understanding. Teachers' secure subject knowledge enables them to explain new ideas and strategies clearly. They give pupils plenty of opportunities to discuss and explain their work, practise skills and deepen their understanding through problem solving. This was evident in key stage 2 when pupils were challenged to find the area of composite shapes and create different shapes that had the same area.
- Previous weaknesses in the teaching of phonics (the sounds linked to letters) are being addressed well at both key stages. The teaching of phonics, spelling and grammar is precise, consistent and carefully adapted to suit pupils' different needs so that all learn well.
- Good teaching of writing has improved pupils' confidence to write and has resulted in significant progress over the course of the year. Pupils are taught the features of different types of writing and learn to use these in their own imaginative stories, factual and persuasive accounts, poems, instructions and letters.
- Pupils make good use of helpful guidance on classroom walls to support their literacy and numeracy skills. They know the targets they are aiming for and consider that the feedback they get from teachers, including through marking, helps them to improve their work.
- Across the curriculum, teachers have good subject knowledge and use questioning successfully to assess and extend pupils' learning. They use correct vocabulary in explanations and expect pupils to do so too.
- Teachers design imaginative topics that reinforce basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics in a range of subjects. In science, key stage 1 pupils research nocturnal animals and produce information leaflets about hedgehogs and owls. In learning about the Great Fire of London, they write diaries and think of questions to ask Samuel Pepys.
- In both key stages, work in science and computing frequently reinforces mathematical skills, such as when younger pupils use Venn diagrams to sort materials, and older pupils record and analyse pulse rates and create algorithms.
- Many of the parents who responded to the Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were very positive about the impact that teaching is having on their children's learning and progress. A minority were unhappy with the regularity of homework at key stage 2, with one commenting that no homework had been provided for over a year.
- These comments contrast starkly with the 100% parental satisfaction with homework in the school's recent survey of parents' views. The comments are also inconsistent with information from pupils about homework. The headteacher explained that while homework is not extensive, it is provided regularly and in line with the school's policy.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils describe the school as 'a big family where everyone knows each other and helps each other out'. They appreciate the close and supportive relationships with staff, whom they describe as 'kind and helpful'.
- Pupils say that they are not afraid of sharing worries or concerns with staff because they trust their teachers and know that they care.
- Pupils are very clear about the improvements to behaviour that have occurred. One described the school as 'massively better' and few could think of anything to improve it. One said, 'Nothing could make this school better, it's the best in the world', while another said, 'All the kids are nice and we all look out for one another.'
- The school's caring ethos is very evident at breaktimes where many older pupils chat to and look after younger pupils, and do this with obvious tenderness and care. While there is a rota of playground buddies to ensure that no one feels left out or alone, it is clear that pupils instinctively interact well with each other.
- In lessons, pupils are helped to develop useful independent learning skills. When asked to discuss things with a partner or work cooperatively, they do this well.
- The strong family ethos of this school results in pupils having a particularly mature understanding, empathy and tolerance of classmates who sometimes struggle to manage their behaviour and emotions. They recognise that some pupils lack confidence and support them well in lessons.

- Pupils show an informed understanding and respect for people's differences and rights. They are very aware of how inappropriate behaviour, such as teasing and name-calling, can hurt people's feelings. Pupils express their distaste for such behaviour vehemently. One explained, 'Saying "gay" to tease someone is just not acceptable – people have rights and a right to be gay if they want.' The same fervour was reflected in pupils' views of other prejudice-based behaviours.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe and healthy. They explain the need for a healthy diet containing fruit, vegetables, plenty of water and not too much sugar. Keeping fit and having eight hours' sleep were other features they identified for a healthy lifestyle. Pupils also showed an appropriate awareness of the need for adults to drink responsibly and of the dangers of drug misuse.
- Pupils have an informed understanding of how to keep safe, including e-safety. They are able to recount many of the pitfalls that can happen when using technology.
- Pupils value opportunities to be involved in school decisions, for example about extra-curricular clubs and the charities the school will support. The pupils explained how they researched different charities and campaigned for their preferences before voting to decide on the charity they would support. They appreciate the visits to places of interest and visitors to school who, for example, help them learn about different religions and cultures.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good and has improved significantly since the previous inspection.
- The recent school survey of pupils' views shows that the majority of pupils have very positive views of behaviour.
- There is a notable number of vulnerable pupils who sometimes struggle to manage their behaviour. The school works very effectively to provide these pupils with good support and coping strategies, which have significantly reduced incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Where these do occur, the staff manage situations expertly so that the flow of teaching and learning is not interrupted.
- Pupils know that behaviour is not always perfect and recognise that some pupils find it difficult to behave well all the time. They say that teachers deal with misbehaviour quickly and that it does not disrupt lessons. Pupils' mature understanding of troubled pupils was summed up by one pupil who said, 'We know to ignore it (misbehaviour) because it doesn't help the person who is having a bad time.'
- The school has high expectations of pupils' behaviour and a clear system of rewards and sanctions, which pupils understand. While the school provides significant and effective support to help pupils behave well and manage their emotions and anger, unacceptable behaviour occasionally results in short, monitored exclusion from school.
- During the inspection, behaviour in lessons was impeccable. Pupils listened carefully to their teachers, showed good interest in lessons and concentrated hard on their work.
- In discussions, pupils were extremely polite. When moving around the school and in assembly, their behaviour was of the highest standard. In the dining hall and on the playground, pupils played and chatted amicably and treated each other and adults respectfully.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school and appreciate the measures that are taken to keep them safe. They explain that bullying is rare, but have a clear understanding of different types of bullying and realise that it is important to tell someone if this happens. Pupils who said that they had experienced bullying explained that the school took their concerns seriously and sorted things out to their satisfaction.
- Attendance has improved since the last inspection, as a result of higher expectations and more rigorous procedures to follow up absences. Most pupils attend regularly and arrive on time for the start of lessons.
- Given the small size of the school, attendance rates can be affected significantly by the absence of one or two pupils or the persistent absence of a small number of pupils. Overall, however, attendance rates are close to the national average in most year groups. Persistent absence is followed up rigorously and, together with the close communication with education welfare services, has resulted in some significant improvements to the attendance of pupils with a history of persistent absence.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- As the number of pupils in year groups is almost always in single figures, comparing their end of key stage attainment with national figures does not give a sufficiently clear picture of pupils' attainment and progress over time. Key pupil groups, such as boys and girls, the most able and disadvantaged pupils, are similarly too small and variable from year to year to make any comparisons with national data meaningful.

- In the same way, because some year groups include a relatively large number of pupils who have complex and varied special educational needs and/or disabilities, comparing the school's national test and assessment results from one year to the next is not a useful indicator of trends over time.
- Leaders and teachers are working very successfully to address the legacy of underachievement that is still evident in the attainment of some pupils in both key stages. Consistently good-quality teaching and tailored learning programmes are having a very positive impact and enabling pupils who have fallen behind in their learning to catch up.
- As a result, pupils in both key stages, including the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged, are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics in relation to their prior attainment and capabilities. This good progress is demonstrated well in pupils' work and in the school's regular and accurate assessments of their attainment in these subjects.
- More pupils, including some disadvantaged pupils, are on track to attain the standards expected for their age than was the case at the last inspection. Where this is not the case, including for disadvantaged pupils, lower than expected attainment is due to pupils' specific and complex special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school's assessments of these pupils and the work in their books show that they make good and at times exceptional progress.
- This is noticeably evident in pupils' writing. From a point where some pupils at key stage 2 could only write a few lines at the beginning of the year, they are now producing two pages of writing, with improved spellings, grammar and structure. Similarly good improvement is evident in the work of pupils at key stage 1.
- Pupils who had not previously attained the expectations for their age in reading are now demonstrating good use of phonics skills and a better understanding of texts than previously. Reading remains a high priority for the school so that all pupils are able to make the most of their learning in different subjects.
- Assessments of pupils' attainment and progress in all other national curriculum subjects are made against the expectations for their age. These show a similarly positive picture of progress for all groups of pupils.
- The school's success in boosting pupils' confidence and enabling them to believe that they can achieve well is central to the good improvements to pupils' achievement that have been made.
- No matter what their personal, health or emotional issues, and whatever their capabilities, each day pupils at this school receive a clear and resounding message that they are valued, cherished and cared for, and that there are no boundaries to their ambitions. As such, the school is ensuring that all pupils are now much better prepared for the next stages of their education.

Early years provision

is good

- Prior to September 2015, children in the early years comprised only Reception-aged children, many of whom had not received any pre-school education. Children' attainment on entry varies over time due to the nature of small year groups and the inclusion in some years of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, more often than not, children's skills on beginning the Reception Year have been below what is typical for their age.
- Very small numbers in year groups mean that comparisons with national figures for children's attainment at the end of the early years are an unreliable indicator of the effectiveness of the provision. In the last two years, assessment information for children at the end of the Reception Year shows that where a child did not attain a good level of development, they made good progress from their earlier attainment and in line with their capabilities.
- The headteacher was quick to recognise the gap in pre-school educational provision in the village and the impact in relation to children's attainment on entry, as well as their long-term academic and personal development. The recent establishment of the extended provision for two-year-olds and Nursery-aged children has been highly popular and successful. The integration of Reception-aged children into this new class at the start of the summer term is also working well.
- Pending the start of the new, experienced early years teacher in September 2016, the school has benefited from the temporary appointment of a newly qualified teacher with specific early years expertise. This teacher has been well supported in her first year of teaching and worked closely with the teacher in class one who, until Easter this year, had taught the Reception children.
- Notwithstanding, the early years teacher's practice demonstrates a thorough understanding of the needs of children in this phase of education. Her impact on promoting the children's good progress, positive attitudes and enjoyment of school has been noteworthy.

- In establishing the extended early years provision, support staff undertook significant additional training, including visits to early years settings recognised for their outstanding provision. This has been particularly beneficial in ensuring that all staff are fully conversant with good early years practice, including that for two-year-olds.
- The introduction of key workers has ensured that all children feel close to a specific adult who knows them and their parents well. This helps the children, particularly the youngest, to feel secure. While some are initially reluctant to separate from their parents, they quickly settle and become increasingly confident in exploring the different activities on offer. Their independence is developing well within the good support structure that is provided and they are beginning to build relationships with other children.
- Throughout the day, all adults interact well with the children, involving them in meaningful talk and extending their language. Adults continually reinforce the children's personal, social and emotional development, using play well to this end.
- During the inspection, children of all ages were engaging well in the activities provided. Many showed strong fascination in their play and sustained involvement in activities for relatively long periods. In the sand, for example, one child spent a long time exploring how different textures of sand poured down a chute, altered the speed of movement of an attached waterwheel.
- The classroom provides good scope to accommodate the full range of learning, such as quiet browsing and sharing of books, messy learning linked to art and craft activities, and large construction activities. However, the building does not allow free flow between indoor and outdoor learning. A lack of toilets in the classroom, situated off the main hall, means that children have to be taken by an adult to use the main school toilets. While this situation is not ideal, staff manage things well.
- The children have daily opportunities to learn outdoors, including in the exciting and thoughtfully constructed forest garden. Here, the children relish exploring the wide range of natural and made objects provided. While their physical development is enhanced particularly well in this area, the potential to develop all aspects of learning is capitalised on well by the adults.
- Reception-aged children have good opportunities to develop and practise literacy and numeracy skills in well-targeted activities and through play. They receive daily, good-quality input on phonics, the impact of which is evident in their good development in reading and writing. Children's understanding of number, shape and measure is good so that many are very well prepared for beginning work in Year 1.
- The introduction of phonics to nursery-aged children is working well and the youngest children are also developing an awareness of sounds and rhymes through games, songs and stories. This is already ensuring that the children are better prepared for full-time schooling.
- Staff check children's achievements regularly and these are comprehensively depicted in individual learning journals. Parents value these immensely and contribute to them. Teaching staff regularly discuss their assessments of children's achievement and use these to plan the next steps in children's learning.
- Safeguarding requirements, including adult-child ratios, are met.
- School leaders have numerous ideas and plans for the development of the provision that will undoubtedly improve it in many ways. However, even at this early stage of its development, it is clear that the provision is meeting the children's needs well and that they are receiving good-quality teaching and learning experiences, appropriate to their age. The wholehearted praise from parents is testament to this.

School details

Unique reference number	119405
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10012124

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	56
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephen Wedlin
Headteacher	Christine Adams
Telephone number	01704 227 323
Website	www.banks.lancsngfl.ac.uk
Email address	head@banks-methodist.lancs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	18 March 2014

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.
- A very small proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the pupil premium provides support is above average (the pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are in the care of the local authority).
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is high. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is also high.
- In September 2015, the school extended its early years provision. A new class was formed, providing part-time places for two-year olds and part- or full-time places for Nursery-aged children. The school's Reception-aged children joined this new class at the beginning of the summer term 2016, having previously been taught in a class with Year 1 and Year 2 pupils.
- Reorganisation of the other two classes occurred at the same time. Year 3 pupils moved classes and are now taught with pupils in Years 1 and 2. The other class now caters for pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6.
- After the school's last inspection, there was considerable turnaround of staff and governors. Two new teachers began permanent appointments in September 2014 and a new teacher has been appointed to lead the early years provision from September 2016. Members of the current governing body are mostly new since the last inspection.
- The government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6, do not apply because of the very small numbers in each year group.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school provides a breakfast and after-school club.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in all classes.
- The inspector checked pupils' work, listened to some pupils reading and reviewed the school's assessment information about their attainment and progress.
- A formal discussion was held with eight pupils. Other pupils were spoken to informally in lessons and at breaktimes. Pupils' responses to a recent school survey of their views were also considered.
- A range of documentation was reviewed, including the school's evaluation of its work and records of monitoring visits from the local authority.
- The inspector checked the school's safeguarding information, records of pupils' behaviour and attendance, the school's improvement plans and information about teachers' performance.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, teaching staff, three governors and representatives from the local authority.
- There were too few responses to Parent View to provide an overview of parents' responses to the 12 survey questions. However, eight parents provided written comments and these were considered alongside a recent survey of parents' views undertaken by the school.
- The inspector took account of nine responses to the online staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Margot D'Arcy, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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