

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr S Cumbo
Headteacher
Lower Darwen Primary School
Milking Lane
Lower Darwen
Darwen
Lancashire
BB3 0RB

Dear Mr Cumbo

Short inspection of Lower Darwen Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your leadership and vision has resulted in the school being in a stronger position than at the previous inspection. It is a credit to your leadership that pupils have continued to achieve good standards despite the potential for disruption of extensive building work over the last few years.

Provision for children in care is a strength of the school. Systems and processes identify individual pupils' learning needs and then develop focused learning plans to closely match them. Ongoing monitoring and assessment of their academic, physical and mental health needs leads to improved outcomes and well-being for these pupils. You place great emphasis on supporting their personal development and, as a result, they thrive at Lower Darwen.

Governors are a visible presence in your school. They work closely with subject leaders, meet with parents and carers at open evenings and talk regularly with pupils. This helps to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the quality of education at the school. They offer effective support and challenge to leaders where it is required.

The majority of parents who spoke to me at the start of the day and who responded to Parent View were very positive about the school. They spoke of how happy their children are at the school. Parents are full of praise for the school's family ethos. Your strong and insightful leadership is highly praised by parents, the local authority improvement officer and pupils. One comment captured the views of many parents: 'This is an amazing

school run by a very dedicated and talented headteacher.'

Following the last inspection, you were given a number of areas to improve. The first was to ensure that pupils take more responsibility for their own learning in lessons. Training has been effective in helping teachers provide suitable opportunities for pupils to do this. This has improved pupils' ability to contribute to their own learning and has enhanced the development of their independent learning skills.

You were also asked to improve the quality of teaching. Leaders have ensured that staff have the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to improve outcomes for pupils. Teachers are keen to develop their expertise and appreciate the opportunities to share good practice with other colleagues. Teachers in key stage 1 and 2 have high expectations and challenge pupils so that an increased number achieve the highest standards. As a result progress is good. You were also asked to ensure that adult support in lessons is most effective in helping pupils with specific needs. We agreed to look at this area as part of the inspection.

During the inspection, we discussed areas where further work is required to support your school improvement. You acknowledge there is still work to do in the early years to encourage, develop and extend the most able children's learning and to ensure that more children are ready for Year 1.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff and governors receive effective training. You know your families well and work effectively with outside agencies to ensure that the most vulnerable families and pupils are safe. You have systems in place to check the suitability of staff to work with children. There are also regular checks of these systems by senior staff and governors. Staff know their pupils well and have a good knowledge of potential signs of abuse.

Pupils told me that they feel very safe in school and know that adults will respond effectively to any concerns they have. Pupils recall what they have learned in lessons that have a focus on safety. These lessons are part of the curriculum and cover activities such as water safety and keeping safe online. Pupils understand the different types of bullying that exist but say that there are few examples of it in school. All parents who responded to Parent View believe that children are safe and happy in school.

Inspection findings

- We agreed some areas of focus for this inspection. The first of these was to consider the actions taken by leaders to improve pupils' outcomes in reading. The English leader has ensured that there is a consistent approach to the development of fluency in reading. You have also raised teachers' awareness of the expectations for pupils which has resulted in a greater focus on reading across the school. Reading activities build upon pupils' previous learning. Across the school you ensure that there is a daily phonics lesson and time for pupils to apply this knowledge in their reading and writing. In supporting current pupils to make better progress you have also provided training

for all staff in the teaching of early reading. Pupils I spoke to enjoy reading and studying the carefully selected texts which link to their learning. You provide appropriate reading material in other curriculum areas that develop and broaden pupils' vocabulary. As a result, your reading assessment information shows that practical changes to approaches and the curriculum are having a positive impact on pupils' progress.

- The next area we looked at was how you are improving outcomes in the early years. Leaders have a very good grasp of the strengths and weaknesses in the provision. They have taken action to strengthen the effectiveness of teaching. Training is used to good effect to improve the quality of adult interactions with children. As a result, children are engaged in learning activities with greater focus. Evidence from children's work and from your own assessment information shows that current children in the early years make good progress. However, more could be done to ensure that the interests of the most able are always sustained and that adults challenge them to take their learning even further.
- The next area we looked at was how you are improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils across the school. You have accurately identified the barriers to learning that these pupils face. Teaching is accurately matched to pupils' needs. A proportion of disadvantaged pupils also have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Leaders use a range of information to support this group of pupils successfully. Effective challenge for the most able disadvantaged pupils is also evident, particularly in key stage 2 mathematics. Evidence from pupils' books and the school's own assessment information confirms that disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their different starting points.
- The final area we looked at was the effectiveness of support and provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Your work to support these pupils is a key strength of the school. You have successfully incorporated the provision for pupils who have a hearing impairment within mainstream classes. Expectations are high and questioning is used skilfully to develop pupils' learning and deepen their thinking skills. Highly trained teaching assistants provide very effective support to pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities across the school. The monitoring of these pupils is also strong and the standards they achieve are improving so they match those other pupils nationally with similar starting points. Evidence seen during the inspection, especially in writing and mathematics, shows pupils make accelerated progress from their individual starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- More children leave early years fully prepared for Year 1, and the interests of the most able children in early years are always sustained and they are challenged to take their learning even further.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Blackburn with Darwen. This

letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hunter
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Throughout the inspection I spoke to pupils, both formally and informally, about their work and school life. I held meetings with you, your deputy headteacher and subject leaders to discuss improvements in their areas of responsibility. I also spoke to the local authority school improvement partner.

I looked at work in pupils' books and reviewed documentation which included your evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the school development plan. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day and considered 29 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey.

I visited classes along with you to observe pupils' learning. I met with governors to discuss aspects of school leadership and management. I reviewed a range of documentation about safeguarding, including the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff.