

Inspection of a good school: Blackburn St Thomas' Church of England Primary School

Newton Street, Blackburn, Lancashire BB1 1NE

Inspection dates:

28 and 29 February 2024

Outcome

Blackburn St Thomas' Church of England Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive in this welcoming school. Pupils, staff, and parents and carers talked about it as being 'the heart of the community'. Warm relationships are at the centre of this inclusive school.

Pupils said that they feel safe and happy. They know that adults care about them. They value the wide range of support that they receive. They trust that there is always an adult available to help them if they are worried.

Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), rise to the school's high expectations of their achievement. Many pupils speak English as an additional language. The school is successful at making sure that this is not a barrier to learning. Pupils are eager and confident learners. Most achieve well in a range of subjects.

Pupils behave well. They live out the school values, such as showing respect and kindness, in the way that they play and talk with each other. Examples of this are helping someone who may have fallen over in the playground or talking to peers who might feel lonely.

Pupils learn to be valuable and responsible members of the school community. They enjoy the wide range of experiences that staff organise to bring the curriculum alive. These include trips to museums and the theatre and residential trips to London and France.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has designed a thoughtful curriculum that carefully considers the needs of pupils, many of whom join the school with limited English. It is an interesting and effective curriculum from the early years through to the end of key stage 2. In all

subjects, it gives pupils the knowledge and understanding that they need to become confident and motivated learners. The school has thought carefully about what it wants staff to teach pupils and the order in which they should teach it. The school's approach to the curriculum ensures that pupils are well prepared for the next stages in their education and for life in modern Britain.

Teachers explain new ideas clearly. They are knowledgeable about the subjects that they teach. They help pupils to revisit and remember important learning. They use a range of strategies to ensure that pupils make secure connections between new and previously learned concepts. Teachers use assessment information well to establish what pupils know, where there might be gaps, and to shape future learning.

Reading is of central importance in this school. Pupils told inspectors that reading helps them to learn new things, improve their vocabulary and transport them to another world. Staff use good-quality texts, which they link to themes and topics to bring learning to life.

Children in the early years enjoy sharing picture books with adults and their friends. As soon as they start in the Reception class, they learn letters and sounds through well-crafted activities. Staff use their specialist knowledge of the teaching of early reading extremely well. The vast majority of pupils achieve well in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1. They become confident readers by the time they leave key stage 1. Staff help pupils who find reading more difficult. Those who can, quickly catch up with their peers and read confidently and fluently.

The school is ambitious for the high number of pupils with SEND. It identifies their needs accurately. This enables teachers to give these pupils the help that they need. It ensures that pupils with SEND build their confidence and self-esteem. These pupils are successful and learn all they should. They participate fully in the same curriculum and opportunities as their peers.

Pupils behave well in lessons. They are highly motivated to learn. They listen carefully in lessons. The school prioritises good attendance. It has put in place a range of strategies to address the high number of pupils who are persistently absent. Staff analyse and track absence thoroughly. However, there remains a stubbornly high number of pupils who miss important learning because they do not attend school regularly enough.

The school prioritises pupils' personal development. Pupils enjoy the many after-school clubs that the school organises, including, singing, cooking, 'Formula One' and a model building and construction league club, which has won national and international competitions. They particularly benefit from and appreciate the opportunities that the school provides to promote their positive mental health.

Governors share staff's ambition for pupils. Staff morale is high. They value the support that they receive for their well-being and workload. For example, they appreciate the time the school gives them to carry out their curriculum responsibilities effectively. They are very proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Too many pupils are absent or persistently absent from school. As a result, they miss important learning and do not achieve as well as they could. The school should strengthen strategies to improve pupils' attendance.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in September 2013.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

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| Unique reference number | 119355 |
| Local authority | Blackburn with Darwen |
| Inspection number | 10286252 |
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of pupils | 3 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 452 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Ilham Umer |
| Headteacher | Yusra Arshad |
| Website | www.stthomasblackburn.org.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 10 April 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- Blackburn St Thomas Church of England Primary is a small voluntary-controlled school.
- Since the last inspection, in April 2018, there have been significant changes in the school's leadership team. This includes a new headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher.
- The school received a section 48 inspection, which is an inspection of the school's religious character, in February 2018. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place during the autumn term 2024.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision for pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in her evaluation of the school.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, she discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work. She spoke with pupils about their learning. She also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector spoke with pupils about school life.
- The inspector spoke with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. She also spoke to the special educational needs coordinator and members of the pastoral team.
- The inspector held discussions with a range of school staff about workload and well-being.
- The inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. She also met with a representative of the local authority, a school-improvement advisor and a representative of the diocese.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documentation, including that relating to school improvement.
- The inspector considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. She also considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Sue Eastwood, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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