



St James' Church of England Primary School, Lower Darwen

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119503
Local Authority Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number 291441
Inspection dates 28 February –1 March 2007
Reporting inspector Mark Williams HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	off Stopes Brow
School category	Voluntary aided		Lower Darwen, Darwen
Age range of pupils	4–11		Lancashire, BB3 0QP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01254 698656
Number on roll (school)	219	Fax number	01254 698656
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Dr Graham Barlow
		Headteacher	Mrs Susan Wooldridge
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. The school's religious character was inspected at the same time by an inspector from the Diocese of Blackburn. His report will be made available separately.

Description of the school

This is an average size primary school. It serves a mixed socio-economic area with pockets of disadvantage. The starting point of pupils when they enter the school is generally low. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above the national average as is the proportion entitled to free school meals. The school has attained the national Healthy School award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with pupils, governors, staff and the vast majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire that this is a good school. Through its strong Christian ethos, it provides a good education for its pupils and ensures that their personal development and well-being are outstanding. The school has a clear and shared vision, which is due in no small part to the dynamic leadership of the headteacher and the good support of her deputy and assistant headteachers. They have responded to the challenges before them with vigour and have made very good use of support from the local authority. Leadership and management overall are good and are enhanced by the increasingly effective role of subject leaders who have a sound command of their subject areas, and the governing body who hold the school to account well. The school offers good value for money and because of improvements since the previous inspection, the progress pupils are making in their learning and their outstanding personal development and well-being, it is demonstrating good capacity to make further improvements.

After some years of fluctuation, standards at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 in 2006 were broadly in line with national averages. This represents good progress from pupils' generally low starting points. Rates of pupil progress between Key Stage 1 and 2 have been particularly pleasing and have improved year on year since 2004. This overall good progress is the result of determined and focused actions to identify underachievement and to put into place good quality programmes of support. There has also been a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching. This is good across the school with some that is outstanding. The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage is also good.

The quality of the taught curriculum is satisfactory. It is broad but insufficiently balanced. While the school has correctly focused on improving pupil progress in English, mathematics and science, other areas of the curriculum are not as well covered and opportunities to develop, for example writing skills in other subjects, have been missed. Nonetheless, the curriculum for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) and the opportunities for pupils to develop skills in information and communication technology (ICT) are good. The range of extra-curricular activities, educational visits and visitors to school is also good.

The care, guidance and support given to pupils are good. The school is a very caring community. Very good links have been established with various organisations; for example, with the NSPCC. Good programmes of support exist for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Such programmes, however, do not always make clear what pupils are to achieve at the end of their periods of support. All pupils are encouraged in their learning through teachers' positive comments when they mark. Some marking informs pupils well what steps they need to take next to improve their work. This is not a consistent feature across the school.

The key strength of the school is the pupils' personal development and well-being. This is outstanding and is the result of good quality care, guidance and support,

improvements in the quality of teaching and determined leadership that has high expectations, the school's Christian ethos and the well-being of pupils at its heart.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of the curriculum in order to provide pupils with a better balance of subjects and opportunities to reinforce key skills across these subjects.
- Specify more clearly what pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are to achieve when they complete programmes of support.
- Ensure that marking informs pupils what steps they need to take in order to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From generally low starting points, pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, make good progress in their learning. They attain standards in English, mathematics and science that are broadly in line with national averages. Children's good progress begins in the Foundation Stage and continues across Key Stages 1 and 2. This is the result of good teaching and thorough systems of tracking what pupils can or cannot do. The information gained is used well by the school's senior leaders, teachers and teaching assistants to plan lessons and programmes of support that meet the needs of all pupils well.

The school is aware that in the past, higher ability pupils have not achieved as well as those in other schools. Work in class is now more challenging for these pupils and the indications are that they are making good progress in line with other pupils. The school had also identified boys' writing as an area of previous underachievement. Teachers' good use of resources, reference to topical issues and television programmes such as 'Newsround', and the effective deployment of teaching assistants has ensured that boys are now making better progress, too.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of pupils are outstanding. Their spiritual, moral and social development is excellent and their cultural development is good. They are increasingly aware of different cultures and faiths in Britain and the wider world. In an outstanding act of worship celebrating World Book Day, the headteacher encouraged pupils to reflect on holy books and scrolls such as The Bible, The Koran and The Torah. Pupils did this maturely and were able to articulate common features and the need to respect faiths different to their own.

Pupils report that they enjoy almost everything about their school. They are enthusiastic learners and they feel safe and secure because of the excellent relationships between staff and pupils. They appreciate the very positive ethos that has been established throughout the school. As a result, despite a small number of parents expressing

concerns, behaviour is good. The few pupils who have difficulty adjusting to school routines respond well to the support given. Pupils show respect for each other and are attentive in the classroom. They know right from wrong and what it is to be a good friend. They have responded well to the school's efforts to improve attendance.

Pupils show that they understand the need to have healthy lifestyles. They take up good opportunities in school to eat sensibly and to take regular exercise. For example, they enthusiastically tucked into the good range of fruit and vegetables offered and attended lunchtime and after-school sporting activities.

All pupils are given responsibilities. Older pupils make written applications to become play-leaders. They report that the interview at the hands of the school council is rigorous! Older pupils also monitor lunchtime equipment, act as 'buddies' and take charge of resources during acts of worship. The members of the school council display great maturity and are actively involved in decision making. Pupils have high levels of self-confidence and are able to work with partners and independently. Coupled with good rates of progress in English, mathematics, science and ICT, they are very well prepared for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good and results in pupils making good progress in their learning. Some teaching is outstanding.

Typically, lessons are well planned. What is to be learnt is shared even with the youngest pupils. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support pupils who need help. More challenging work is given to those who require stiffer tests of their abilities. Teachers and their assistants make good use of skilful questioning, prompts and ICT to enable pupils to work things out for themselves in English, mathematics and science. However, these good attributes are not always evident in other subjects where there is an over-reliance on worksheets.

Adults make learning fun and this is appreciated by the pupils. For example, Year 2 pupils in an outstanding science lesson exclaimed 'WOW!' when their teacher and teaching assistant dressed up as a battery and a torch respectively and had the pupils form a chain to create a complete electrical circuit. When the pupils passed the 'electrical current' on by the squeezing of hands and the teaching assistant raised bright yellow pom-poms in the air to represent light being switched on, their gasps of awe and sense of understanding was spine-tingling.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory overall, but good in the Foundation stage. Here children are offered a broad range of learning opportunities.

The curriculum across the school provides well for pupils' personal and social development and helps them to adopt healthy and safe lifestyles and to acquire positive attitudes. Curriculum planning, teaching and learning support good achievement and progress in the core subjects and ICT. The curriculum is broad, but lacks balance in the foundation subjects. Work in these areas is not always sufficiently challenging.

There are some examples of how exciting the curriculum can be, such as the French culture day and the visit of the storyteller, which engaged and excited pupils and enhanced their enjoyment of reading and writing. The visit to Disneyland Paris and the wide range of extra-curricular activities further enrich pupils' experience. Other visitors, such as the vicar, the police, the fire brigade and the NSPCC make a strong contribution to PSHCE provision.

Good lunchtime and after-school provision includes football, netball, drama, choir and gymnastics.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support for pupils. Pupils feel safe and secure. They find all staff and other adults in school approachable and caring. They are confident that if they have a problem they will receive support. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are in place. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities receive good support and as a result, make good progress.

The school works very well with a wide range of outside agencies; for example, with the NSPCC, and employs a family worker to support pupils, especially those who are vulnerable. Nearly all parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire feel that their views are listened to. They appreciate the way that the school seeks to involve them in their children's learning, for example, through parent evenings and various curriculum workshops.

There are good systems for tracking pupils' progress and some good examples of the process by which targets are set. As a result, pupils make good progress. However, the marking that teachers do is not always consistent across the school. It does not always inform pupils well enough about their achievements nor guide them in the next steps of their learning. Also, the good programmes of support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities do not always make clear what these pupils are to achieve.

Health and safety procedures are well established in the school. The school has achieved national Healthy School status and is currently working towards meeting local authority standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good, overall. The leadership of the headteacher, in post for two years, is outstanding. Her dynamism and enthusiasm for success are

infectious. She is ably supported by her deputy and assistant headteachers plus the active governing body who hold the school to account well. The results of this strong leadership include improved rates of progress in learning, outstanding personal development and well-being, and improvements made to the quality of teaching across the school. Leaders and governors have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. This has enabled them to plan improvements effectively.

Leadership and management are not solely the responsibility of the senior leaders. Subject leaders are increasingly effective in taking responsibility for their subjects. Whilst their role is still developing, they have a sound grasp of standards and the quality of planning in their subjects. Support staff are given roles of responsibility, too. For example, one organises the deployment of teaching assistants to support pupils with particular needs and another has oversight of the training and work of the play-leaders. Such examples, plus the good work of administrative staff, enable the senior leaders to have a good overview of the full work of the school and to measure the impact of the improvement measures that have been put into place.

Good management ensures that the school runs well on a day-to-day basis. Financial management is sound. The school makes very good use of its links with external agencies. It seeks the views of parents and pupils and acts upon findings. Future developments include a breakfast club to give pupils a good start to the day and to help further improve their punctuality and attendance. The vast majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire appreciate the work that the school does. The school is well placed to make further improvements.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

St James' Church of England Primary School, Lower Darwen

off Stopes Brow

Lower Darwen

Darwen

Lancashire

BB3 0QP

2 March 2007

Dear Pupils,

On behalf of Mr Edwards, I am writing to you to thank you for the warm welcome to your school, the help you gave us in the inspection and, of course, to let you know our findings. You will be pleased to hear that we think St James' is a good school. It provides you with a good education so you make good progress in your learning and are outstanding in terms of personal development and well-being. Well done to you all!

So why is your school good? Well, your headteacher leads your school very well. We think her enthusiasm is infectious! She is very well supported by your deputy and assistant headteachers as well as other adults in the school and the governors. They have a good grasp of what is good about St James' and what needs to get better. For example, they know that the adults care for you very much and you are taught well. They also know that some of your targets could be clearer and that some marking needs to let you know more often what to do to improve. Also, now that you do good work in English, mathematics and science, you need to have more opportunities to study other subjects in greater detail.

Your school cares for you very much and you are responding very well as good citizens. We thought the play-leaders, the helpers in worship and the school council were very mature and sensible. We know that you all want to help to make St James' even better and we wish you every blessing for the future.

Mark Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools