

Lower Darwen Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119120
Local Authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	301683
Inspection date	3 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Geoffrey Yates

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	288
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Steve Cox
Headteacher	Mrs Susan Morton
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2003
School address	Milking Lane Lower Darwen Darwen Lancashire BB3 0RB
Telephone number	01254 55639
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school is of an above average size for primary schools nationally. It serves an area of mostly private housing. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly above average. Attainment when children start at the school is below average. Most pupils are from mainly White British backgrounds. The school acts as a resource base for hearing impaired pupils in the local authority. A below average number of pupils receive free school meals. The school has won many awards including a Healthy Schools award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, with outstanding strengths in children's personal development and the care it provides. The school provides good value for money because it meets well the varied needs of all its pupils including those who have impaired hearing. Over a number of years, the school has been highly successful in ensuring that pupils make very good progress in Years 3 to 6. Parents view the school's work very positively; one parent's comment sums up the views of many, 'The inviting attitude of teachers and other staff alike gives me faith that my child is in the right school, receiving the best education and care he/she deserves.' The highly effective partnerships with parents, the local high school and the local community all contribute outstandingly to children's learning and personal development.

Pupils achieve well and attain standards that are at least in line with the national average. Greatly improved provision helps pupils make good progress in Reception (Foundation Stage) and as a result children reach the expected levels by the time they enter Year 1. This good progress continues throughout school so that pupils attain at least the national average in English, mathematics and science by the time they leave. However, in Key Stage 1 more able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged to improve on previous best in the work they are asked to do.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are well planned and classroom assistants support pupils very well. Good use is made of assessment information to track pupils' progress. The headteacher and members of staff who work with the hearing impaired pupils ensure that they take a full part in all aspects of school life and ensure that they make good progress.

The school successfully places a strong emphasis on ensuring that all pupils are valued highly, with all members of staff helping to provide outstanding provision for pupils' care and guidance. Relationships between adults and pupils are excellent and there is great sensitivity to the needs of individual learners. Pupils have a very good knowledge of how to live safe, healthy lifestyles and are well prepared for their future life. Pupils' behaviour, personal development and their attitudes to school are outstanding. They are keen to participate in all activities and their above average attendance bears witness to the fact that they enjoy school. Pupils of all ages happily take on responsibilities, whether they are small everyday tasks or the greater commitments of the school council. Pastoral support is outstanding and pupils say they feel very safe in school and that they know there is someone to turn to if they have a problem. Pupils enjoy the wide variety of clubs, visits and visitors that add richness to the school's good curriculum. This is a school where not only basic skills are fostered well but also creativity.

The leadership and management of the school are good. The well respected and the highly determined leadership of the headteacher drives the school forward and has created a very strong team of staff and governors who work extremely well together. The school's focus on improving the quality of pupils' writing has been very successful. The headteacher has good plans in place to involve curriculum leaders more in the monitoring and evaluation of their subject areas. The school's accurate self-evaluation is based on very good checking systems, which show that the school has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the more able pupils in Key Stage 1 attain as well as they can.
- Carry out plans to extend the role of subject leaders.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are at least average. A major strength is the improvement made in the quality of pupils' writing. Pupils make good progress in English, mathematics and science to reach average and sometimes above average standards in national tests by the time they leave. The key to the school's success is good leadership and good teaching. The school over a number of years has been highly successful in ensuring pupils have made very good progress in Years 3 to 6. The school meets successfully the challenging targets they set in English, mathematics and science.

When children start school, their knowledge and skills are below those expected for their age, especially their communication and language skills. They make good progress in the Foundation Stage and by the time they enter Year 1, most meet the national learning goals. In Key Stage 1, standards are broadly average but are somewhat variable at the higher levels because more able pupils have not been sufficiently challenged. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the very good quality support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Outstanding personal development and a real enthusiasm for learning are key reasons why the pupils do well in school. Children respond very well in the Foundation Stage to the many and varied opportunities provided for them to develop their personal skills. Above average attendance figures demonstrate clearly how much pupils like school. Pupils are welcoming to visitors and very polite. A very good range of extra-curricular activities, such as the gardening club, is well supported. Pupils know why physical exercise is important. The school ensures that adequate time is provided for pupils to develop their physical skills. Pupils say they feel very safe and secure because they know that adults will help them if they have a problem. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. They have a very good understanding of the need to help those less fortunate and of different cultures and customs. Behaviour is excellent and everyone gets on well together. Every opportunity is taken for pupils who have hearing impairment to take a full part in all aspects of school life. A particular strength is the pupils' feeling of ownership of their school. The school council make an effective contribution to the school's excellent ethos by giving the pupils a voice in the running of the school. The emphasis placed on developing pupils' basic skills, including the use of information and communication technology (ICT), and the involvement in the local community ensures that pupils are prepared very well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teaching assistants support teachers very well. All members of staff have very good relationships with pupils, which enables learning to proceed at a good pace. There is a good quality of learning in the Foundation Stage with very good use made of the inside and outside areas with staff ensuring that tasks are matched very well to children's needs. All members of staff help pupils to make progress very well, using praise and rewards very effectively. Hearing impaired pupils have excellent support to ensure that their

needs are met. Good use is made of ICT, including good deployment of staff with particular expertise in the subject. A key strength in classes for older pupils is the way teachers involve pupils in setting targets for improvement. As a result, learning is taken forward because pupils are clear about what they need to do. There are some very good examples of teachers using marking to provide pointers for improvement but this is not yet consistent across the school. Tasks are explained clearly, enabling children to settle quickly to their work. However, in Key Stage 1 some worksheets provide insufficient challenge for more able pupils. Teachers use questioning well to find out what children remember and to consolidate their learning. The school makes extensive use of test and assessment information to set pupils challenging targets, inform lesson plans and to accurately identify the specific needs of individual children.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A well planned curriculum with strong links between subjects results in pupils across all age groups experiencing a wide range of valuable and worthwhile learning opportunities. Provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education is a very strong feature of the curriculum. Pupils enjoy school and know their ideas will be listened to. The good range of after-school clubs are much enjoyed by pupils. Events such as those organised to raise pupils' awareness of life in other countries and their involvement in projects at the local high school enrich the school's curriculum provision. For example, pupils benefited greatly from being involved with the high school in an engineering project that allowed them to experience activities that are not normally part of the primary school curriculum. The school provides exceedingly well for those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including hearing impaired pupils. The headteacher has ensured good improvements in the provision for teaching writing and, as a result, standards have risen. Children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage because the curriculum is very well matched to meet children's needs. Outstanding links with the community including pupils meeting with and being able to question members of the local community group extends their knowledge very well of issues beyond school. Links with the high school ensure pupils are prepared well for the next stage in their education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Provision for pupils' safeguarding and personal welfare is very good; child protection procedures are in place and are reviewed regularly. Pupils are given excellent personal support and this helps them to feel safe and secure in school. Parents are extremely happy with the high level of care the school provides. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are catered for very well, with specially qualified staff providing excellent support for pupils with hearing impairment. The school's excellent caring ethos means that pupils feel valued. Staff know the pupils well and the friendly atmosphere helps them to settle quickly to their learning. Pupils speak warmly of the support they get from all staff. Very good systems are in place to track pupils' progress. A major strength is the high level of pupil involvement in helping to set targets for their own improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher leads and manages the school very well and receives good support from her staff. She is highly determined in ensuring that the pupils receive a good 'rounded' education. As a result, pupils feel valued and make good progress. Curriculum subject leaders have good subject knowledge and are totally committed to school improvement. Good plans are in place to involve them further in evaluating the strengths in their subject areas. The school has good systems in place to monitor and evaluate progress and the school improvement plan is a very effective tool for school improvement. Parents and pupils are consulted on a regular basis and their views taken into account. Governance is very good quality. The governors know what is going on in school and act as critical friends to the school. Issues from the previous inspection have been addressed successfully. The school's self-evaluation has resulted in an overview of the work of the school, which was confirmed by the inspection to be accurate. The school has a good capacity to improve.

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Annex A

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	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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	2

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?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Annex A

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

Dear Children

Inspection of Lower Darwen Primary School, Darwen, BB3 0RB

Thank you for the very friendly welcome you gave me when I visited the school recently. I really enjoyed my time with you and seeing some of you in lessons, even if it was only for a short time. I was really pleased to see the children in the Reception age group using the outside area so well.

I am pleased to tell you that your school is a good one and has outstanding strengths in the support you receive and in your personal development. You do well in lessons and in tests because you work hard and understand the importance of this for the future. I agree with you that your teachers and other adults make lessons very interesting and that if you need help you get it. I like the way that the teachers involve you in knowing how to improve your work even further.

Your behaviour is excellent and I was very impressed with how polite you were. You were all active at lunchtime and you benefit from very good playgrounds and many after-school clubs. You told me that you feel safe in school and that if problems occur that an adult will sort it out quickly when you tell them about it. The school council is very busy on your behalf and members enjoy being able to take new things forward to make life better for you.

I have asked the teachers who work with pupils in Key Stage 1 to make sure that the work you are asked to do is always challenging. I have also asked your headteacher to carry out her plan to let the teachers who are responsible for different subjects to get to know even more about how you are getting on in lessons.

Keep on working hard and as a result you can continue to play a major part in ensuring that your school continues to be highly regarded by all who come into contact with it.

Yours sincerely

Geoffrey Yates

Lead Inspector