

Ashleigh Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119200
Local Authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	313218
Inspection dates	8–9 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter McKay

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	224
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Shona Davis
Headteacher	Mrs Christine Henderson
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2004
School address	Ross Street Darwen Lancashire BB3 2JT
Telephone number	01254 703171
Fax number	01254 702242

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves an area of mainly private housing, in which socio-economic conditions are broadly average. The percentage of pupils eligible for a free school meal is below average. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage; a small percentage are from minority ethnic backgrounds, though none are at an early stage of learning English. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The number of pupils on roll has remained relatively stable despite a trend of falling rolls in the area. Since 2005, financial constraints have resulted in the loss of a number of teaching and support staff. The school has also faced the long-term absence of a significant number of teachers due to serious illness. The school has gained Sportsmark and Healthy Schools awards.

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. From broadly average starting points pupils make good progress by the end of Year 6 to reach standards higher than those found nationally. Results in tests at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 have been consistently above average and a significant proportion of pupils exceed the expected rates of progress. Some weaknesses in writing in Years 1 and 2 have been addressed and the school is now looking to achieve the same success in raising standards of reading.

This is an inclusive school which values pupils as individuals and makes every effort to meet their particular needs, so all groups can achieve well. They achieve well because of good teaching and a good curriculum, which increasingly transcends subject boundaries and is enriched by a broad range of visits, residential trips, and sporting, dramatic and artistic activities.

The school gives the highest priority to the care, health and emotional development of its pupils, so that they feel happy, safe and able to enjoy all aspects of school life in a friendly and welcoming environment. New systems for monitoring progress are identifying those who need extra support or more challenge. In this atmosphere their confidence grows and leads to good personal development. Attitudes are invariably positive, behaviour is good and attendance is above average. Most pupils are generous in devoting time and energy to the full range of school activities. They eagerly participate in plenty of healthy exercise and eat sensibly. They develop good basic skills which prepare them well for their future. They are not, however, given sufficient opportunities to develop the capacity to act independently.

The school is strongly endorsed by the great majority of parents. 'I love Ashleigh School as does my daughter', is a typical view. However, some parents feel that they are not always kept informed about important matters, such as a change of class teacher for their child. Nevertheless, strong links with parents, the wider community and with outside agencies enrich the school's provision for its pupils.

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher's strong leadership has brought the school through a period of financial constraint and severe staffing difficulties, without much adverse affect on standards. She has been well supported by governors, who have been prepared to make difficult decisions and take decisive action. The budget deficit is being reduced rapidly and the school provides good value for money. The staff work very well as a team and are committed to improvement. The school has a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management has established an effective Foundation Stage. Children enjoy school and work and play well together well. Children start school with skills and abilities broadly similar to that most frequently found for children of the same age nationally but with weaknesses in skills in speaking and listening. A diverse and relevant curriculum, a well organised environment for learning and the involvement of parents are clear strengths. All adults in the Foundation Stage have a good understanding of the required areas of learning and of how young children learn. Teachers maintain meticulous records of achievement for each child. They use this information to plan work matched to individual needs. As a result of good teaching, achievement and progress are good in most areas, particularly in personal, social and emotional development, knowledge and understanding of the world, creative and physical development

where children reach or exceed the early learning goals set for them. However, in communication, language and literacy skills children remain below the expected level. The school has addressed this by the introduction of a programme in phonics. New strategies designed to develop children as independent learners have been introduced but need to be more firmly established to enable children to make the best possible gains.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards of reading in Key Stage 1.
- Develop pupils' capacity to think and act independently in all aspects of school life.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average and achievement is good. In Key Stage 1 pupils make good progress to reach above average standards in writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2. Standards in reading are average because strategies to bring improvement have not yet been as successful as those to improve writing.

Pupils build on this good start as they move through the school and a trend of above average results in Year 6 tests has been maintained in recent years. In the 2007 national tests, standards overall were above average and challenging targets were met. Value-added measures indicate that this represents satisfactory progress but the school's rigorous assessment and tracking procedures indicate that current Year 6 pupils are achieving well, with a significant number making better than expected progress in all subjects. They also show that more pupils are on course to achieve the higher grades and that all targets are likely to be met. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and all other groups of pupils make comparable progress to others.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. In lessons and around the school pupils' behaviour is good, as is their attitude to work and learning. Pupils show courtesy and respect for others and are enthusiastic about taking part in the interesting range of activities provided for them. Attendance is good. Pupils know and understand why a healthy lifestyle, including regular exercise and a balanced diet is important. They play together safely and have an exceptionally clear sense of right and wrong. They are adamant that they are safe in school and say that although there is some 'silliness' from time to time, bullying is not a problem. In many lessons and assemblies, pupils are encouraged to reflect on a range of topics and to explore issues about feelings such as fairness or sadness. They know about their local culture and talk with great interest about visitors to school who share with them music and dance from other traditions. These experiences aid their understanding of cultures other than their own. Through the school council, pupils are developing as good citizens. They make good contributions to the school and community, notably as 'Eco-warriors' who organise the recycling of paper and ink cartridges. Not enough pupils have developed skills to enable them to think and act independently. The development of basic skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) mean that children are well placed for their ongoing education and beyond.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teacher subject knowledge underpins careful planning. In most lessons pupils are engaged by varied and practical tasks, usually well matched to their needs, and which increasingly develop their understanding of links between subjects. They are given frequent opportunities to discuss their work and assess their own or others' progress. Teaching assistants are deployed well to support pupils who need extra help. Interactive whiteboards are used well to arouse interest and extend learning as teachers learn to exploit their full potential. Good relationships and pupils' positive attitudes create an atmosphere conducive to learning. The level of challenge in lessons is improving but sometimes all pupils do the same work and so not all are suitably stretched. Throughout the school, pupils have insufficient opportunities to work independently because teachers often direct learning too much. Assessment procedures give an accurate picture of pupils' progress and are beginning to inform the way teachers plan lessons to meet different needs. Marking provides encouragement and usually gives pupils helpful advice on how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and meets statutory requirements. The newly developed curriculum maps and the work to create personalised learning programmes are enabling teachers to match work more precisely to the pupils' needs. The curriculum is flexible and is often adapted on a day-to-day basis to take account of emerging needs. Pupils develop good basic skills in numeracy and literacy and, increasingly, in ICT, as facilities improve. Provision for pupils with statements of special educational needs and those with other learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. An effective personal, social and health programme uses interesting resources to support pupils' personal development, providing clear guidance on how they can stay safe and healthy. Pupils value and enjoy the rich programme of sporting and artistic activities, including visiting performers and trips to places of educational interest, which often helps them shine in unexpected ways.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good guidance and support for all pupils, including the most vulnerable, underpins personal and academic development. Pastoral care is outstanding. Teaching and support staff know pupils very well and are dedicated to meeting their needs, drawing on the support of external agencies where required. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Procedures for child protection, health and safety and risk assessments are detailed, thorough and understood by all staff. The school has useful working links with other schools and pupils' transition to secondary education is well managed. First day response to absence has improved the attendance of targeted pupils. Systems for target setting and for tracking pupils' academic progress are beginning to provide a clear picture of individual pupil progress. Teachers are using this data to make informed planning decisions. This data is also used to provide challenge for those pupils capable of attaining higher academic levels or with specific talents in other aspects of their development.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Strong leadership by the head and senior team during a period of instability has given the school a renewed sense of purpose and direction. Morale is good because staff feel valued and feel their views are taken into account. Working relationships are excellent and staff share a commitment to implementing the changes in teaching and curriculum needed to bring further improvement. Leaders and managers at all levels are focused on raising standards and contribute to the strategic direction of the school. Subject leaders are developing the skills and confidence to monitor and evaluate their areas. New systems for assessment, tracking pupil progress and targeting extra support are beginning to take effect, so that challenging targets are consistently met. All aspects of the school's performance are monitored carefully and all matters raised at the last inspection have been dealt with. Accurate self-evaluation identifies the key areas where improvement is needed and the school development plan sets out appropriate strategies for delivery. Governors are well informed, active and supportive. Their astute management has enabled the accommodation to be improved in a time of financial stringency. These strengths indicate that the school has 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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	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.

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

12 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ashleigh Primary School, Blackburn with Darwen, BB3 2JT

Thank you for making my colleague and I so welcome when we visited your school. We were pleased to find out how much you enjoy being part of such a friendly and caring community.

Yours is a good school which helps you to become responsible, confident people who are well prepared for the future. The teachers and other adults take very good care of you and make sure you know how to stay healthy and safe. Your attendance is good and you behave well. Good teaching and your own positive attitudes to learning help you to make good progress in lessons, so that your results in tests are above the national average. You told us how much you enjoy the wide range of extra activities on offer. We are pleased that you take part so enthusiastically in everything you do in school. Your singing in assemblies was truly wonderful!

The headteacher, governors and other staff are always looking for ways to improve the school even more. There are two things they are going to concentrate on. Firstly, helping pupils in Years 1 and 2 to improve their reading and secondly, giving you more activities in which you can think and do things for yourselves, with less help from your teachers.

We hope that you will continue to enjoy all that school offers. Work as hard as you can to make sure you reach your targets – or better still, actually beat them!

Yours sincerely

Peter McKay

Lead inspector