

Featherstone Purston St Thomas Church of England Voluntary
Controlled Junior School
Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108249
Local Authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	324732
Inspection dates	17–18 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Joe Peacock

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	295
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs M Tennant-King
Headteacher	Mrs D Randall
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2006
School address	George Street Featherstone Pontefract West Yorkshire WF7 5BG
Telephone number	01977 723560
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average and serves a diverse, predominately white community in the centre of a former mining town. Unemployment in the locality is high. Almost all pupils are from a White British background and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals and the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are both well above average. The school has had to contend with a number of long-term staff absences, including of the headteacher. The acting headteacher at the previous inspection has been running the school for prolonged periods since then. Her latest term in office extends from March 2008.

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 some outstanding aspects. It is providing good value for money. Staff have worked very hard, and successfully as a team, to compensate for the absence of the headteacher and some long-term absences of colleagues. They are well on the way to rebuilding and restoring the high standards that gained the school Beacon status in a previous inspection. All previous issues have been successfully addressed and the school has a good capacity to improve.

Pupils' personal development is good overall, although attendance is satisfactory. Pupils proudly wear the school badge on their uniform. Most enjoy school and all it has to offer. In the very positive response to the inspection questionnaire, parents showed how much they appreciate what the school is doing for their children. Behaviour is outstanding as pupils respond to the high expectations of staff. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community. They have a good understanding of a healthy lifestyle and are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Children enter from two separate infant schools with standards that are average for their age. They achieve well because of the good-quality provision for them and their excellent attitudes towards their learning. By Year 6, overall standards are average in English and are well above average in mathematics and science. Many pupils find writing difficult and the lower than average standards are adversely affecting the school's overall performance in English. Detailed monitoring shows that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well by Year 6.

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations of pupils which are usually met. Their commitment and enthusiasm ensure that pupils are provided with a good curriculum which gives them plenty to get excited about. All enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular clubs and the visits and trips which add depth to the curriculum. The particular arrangement where teachers' subject strengths are shared with each class within a year group, on one day each week, has been modified since the previous inspection. In Year 6, for example, teachers with recognised skills in science, physical education and information and communication technology (ICT) took each of the three classes in turn for lessons in their subject. Their expertise ensures that pupils are well taught and make good progress.

The care, support and guidance for every pupil is good. The very few pupils who speak English as an additional language are effectively supported by all staff, enabling them to be fully included in lessons and to make good progress. Safeguarding requirements are in place and meet government guidelines. The school's effective links with outside agencies ensure that individual needs, such as the needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are met. As a result, most make good progress.

Leadership and management are good. All key staff work well together as an efficient and effective team and set challenging targets to raise standards. Strong features include community cohesion and equality of opportunity for all pupils. Although the school knows its main strengths and weaknesses, the rigour of school self-evaluation has suffered because of the staffing difficulties and currently does not identify areas for further improvement with enough precision. Governance is good. Governors' commitment and professionalism is reflected in their good

attendance at meetings and on training sessions and their developing involvement in evaluating school effectiveness.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, at least to match those in mathematics and science and particularly writing in Year 6.
- Develop more effective procedures for evaluating the work of the school and identifying areas to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All pupils achieve well from their average starting points due to the good quality of teaching and their willingness to learn. The overall trend is one of steadily improving standards. By the end of Year 6, standards are average in English and well above average in mathematics and science. Weaknesses in writing are the main reason that standards in English are not yet as high. In science, the latest unvalidated national test results show that three quarters of pupils achieved above average standards. This is due to improved teaching skills which provide pupils with exciting hands-on investigations, such as testing air resistance. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making increasingly good progress by Year 6 largely due to the wide range of effective intervention strategies which are designed to support their learning and boost their confidence. The high standards in art and design have been maintained since the previous inspection.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils speak of the school with loyalty and pride. They feel their opinions are listened to and they 'love coming to school'. Their targets are regularly reviewed and pupils are confident staff will help them improve their work. Year 6 pupils are involved in an 'Aim Higher' programme with a local university. The school proudly displays its 'graduation' photographs from the previous year's programme. Pupils say, 'Lessons are fun and teachers are friendly.' They know how to make healthy lifestyle choices and take part in a wide range of sporting activities. The school has an Activemark award in recognition of its sporting achievements. Attendance is satisfactory. The school works hard to encourage pupils to attend regularly and punctually. Year 3 pupils settle quickly into the school as a result of well planned induction procedures. Overall, pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good. However, their cultural development does not have a high enough profile in some classes. Pupils feel safe at school and behaviour is excellent. A very active school council represents pupils' views and uses its budget wisely to advance school projects. Teamwork, skills in ICT and basic skills are developed well and ensure that pupils have a good platform for future achievement.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good, ensuring that pupils enjoy learning. Teachers establish high standards of behaviour and create an effective learning environment in which pupils achieve well. Good relationships with staff give pupils confidence to contribute in lessons. In all classes, teachers

place a very strong emphasis on developing basic literacy and numeracy skills. Most teachers are skillful in planning challenging tasks which match the different abilities of pupils. However, in a few English lessons the same tasks are set for all pupils. Some pupils find these easy and others struggle. Teaching assistants make a positive contribution by effectively supporting individuals, groups and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. On the occasions where teaching and learning are outstanding, pupils are highly motivated by enthusiastic teachers and given challenging tasks, which involves them very well and holds their interest throughout. When marking work, teachers' comments usually celebrate pupils' successes but do not always give clear guidance on how completed work can be further improved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The enthusiastic staff work together well to provide a curriculum that successfully motivates pupils. There is a strong emphasis on numeracy and literacy, with a particular focus on improving the curriculum for boys to encourage and improve their writing. The structured approach to writing, literature of special interest for boys and inspirational links with a local university are beginning to raise standards. Pupils enjoy activities such as Roman, Viking and Tudor events and these are used successfully to reinforce reading, writing, and speaking and listening skills. Specialist visitors for the arts and theatre trips add further enjoyment for all pupils and help maintain the high standards in art and design reported in the previous inspection. Pupils are keen to attend after-school and lunchtime activities and sports clubs. These have been instrumental in forging links with other schools, outside agencies and community links when, for example, the school choir perform in public. Personal, social and health education is well supported through visitors and a structured social education programme. ICT is used well to support and enhance learning in all subject areas.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral support is good with all staff being committed to promoting the well-being of pupils. Procedures for child protection, the safe recruitment of staff, health and safety and to reduce risk are all in place. Very effective behaviour and anti-bullying policies ensure that behaviour is outstanding. Any challenging behaviour is dealt with quickly and effectively. Vulnerable pupils and the very few who speak English as an additional language are well supported. Those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit greatly from the close support and guidance they receive in lessons. The school has good procedures for consulting parents. Strong partnerships and good links with external agencies ensure that pupils and their families receive the support they need for pupils to attend school happily. Effective arrangements are in place to track the progress of pupils and the information gained is used well to set new, more demanding targets. These are reviewed regularly by class teachers so that pupils are aware of how well they have done and how they can improve. Pupils are just beginning to be involved in assessing their own work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The acting headteacher, with the support of two assistant headteachers, governors and all staff, has led the school well through a long period of instability. Staff have maintained positive,

constructive relationships with parents and pupils and successfully raised standards. School morale is high despite the difficulties which have continued since the previous inspection. Increasingly challenging targets are being set and caring, supportive relationships which ensure equality of opportunity are helping pupils to live up to expectations. Governors are strongly supportive of the school. An improved training schedule has helped them to ask key questions to hold the school to account. School self-evaluation is satisfactory. Governors and staff are becoming increasingly involved in the process but it lacks the rigour to provide a broad, detailed evidence base on which to secure key judgements and identify areas to improve with precision. The school is a strong cohesive place and there is an obvious pride in being part of the wider Featherstone community. There are excellent links with the local community and wider links with schools in this country and abroad are developing. Overall, community cohesion is good as is the school's value for money.

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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 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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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 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

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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Featherstone Purston St Thomas Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior School, Pontefract, WF7 5BG

Thank you for being so friendly and polite to me and my colleagues when we were with you. During the inspection, you helped us to find out all we needed to know about how well you work and learn. We also had a really good response to the inspection questionnaires and it was pleasing to see how much your parents like your school too.

Your school is a good school in just about every respect and we judged your behaviour and the contribution you make to the school and Featherstone community to be outstanding. There is so much for you to do and to enjoy, such as the interesting after-school clubs and performing in the choir or the end of term Proms concert.

We could see how well you get on with your teachers and how much you like school. All my colleagues were impressed with your excellent behaviour in lessons and towards one another.

In class, you really concentrate and work hard to finish all the interesting and challenging work. I especially enjoyed watching Year 6 making their spinners to test air resistance in science and a group reporting on a brawl in Verona after studying Romeo and Juliet. You are doing really well in mathematics and science with many of you achieving above average standards. I have asked your teachers to concentrate more on helping you to improve your writing. I hope you work hard at this as it will make such a difference to how well you do in English.

It was a pleasure to meet your hard-working acting headteacher and all the staff, who take such good care of you. They are doing a good job, making school an exciting, fun place for you all. I have asked all staff and governors to check more often and in more detail how well things are going in school to find things that could be better.