

Cedars Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119222
Local Authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	326974
Inspection dates	25–26 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Judith Straw

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	286
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Simon Jones
Headteacher	Mrs Elizabeth Beaumont
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Hawthorn Street Blackburn Lancashire BB1 9TH
Telephone number	01254 261609
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Age group	3–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average Nursery and Infant school which serves a community with families that are predominantly of Asian background. Over 90% of the pupils speak English as an additional language. The largest ethnic group of pupils in school is Pakistani with a smaller proportion from Bangladeshi, Indian, White British or mixed Asian and British families. There are very high levels of social deprivation in the area and a well above average proportion of pupils are entitled to take a free school meal. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. Many children join and leave the school other than at the normal times. The school has a Nursery and three Reception classes in its Early Years Foundation Stage.

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. Some aspects of provision are outstanding. From a very low starting point, children achieve well in their academic progress and reach outstanding levels of personal development. Pastoral care is outstanding. Many parents responded to the questionnaire and their views were overwhelmingly positive, summed up by one parent who wrote, 'Cedar's creates a fantastic learning environment for children to learn and flourish.'

The children are a credit to their parents and the school. Pupils love school and feel safe and happy. They put into practice the good teaching they receive on keeping fit and healthy. They collaborate well, for example, when practising a dance routine or brainstorming ideas, and evaluate each other's work positively and honestly. Pupils participate fully in the life of the school. For example, recently pupils were equal partners on the interviewing panel for artist practitioners to work in school developing a major creative project. Members of the 'green fingers club' are developing a school allotment and others are playground buddies and help at lunchtime. They develop excellent personal skills which will help them in the next stage of their education.

Achievement is good across the school. The proportion of pupils for whom English is not their first language is very high. Effective support enables these pupils to become confident speakers with very positive attitudes to learning and to make good progress in acquiring language, literacy and numeracy skills. Nevertheless, teacher assessments in reading, writing and mathematics have remained well below average overall for several years. However, standards are rising. In 2008 they remained below average but there was clear improvement in reading and mathematics which are now getting closer to the average.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good classroom skills, excellent relationships with their pupils and work in a strong partnership with the teaching and language assistants to make learning enjoyable. However, marking is not focused enough on ensuring that pupils develop the necessary skills in spelling, punctuation and presentation to raise their standards further. The very stimulating and creative curriculum provides a rich and exciting range of experiences for all the children, and builds their confidence, independence, self-esteem and enjoyment of school. It has a very positive impact on the good progress pupils make throughout the school and an excellent effect on their personal development. The good use of specialist support for children at the early stages of learning English as an additional language, or for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities provides pupils with excellent opportunities to access and enjoy the whole curriculum.

Links with families and the contribution the school makes to community cohesion are outstanding and the school carefully plans and evaluates these links. A good example of this is the excellent and exciting work the school has initiated to involve families in their children's learning and the wide range of training opportunities they offer parents. One parent commented on how valuable these courses are: '...they help me build my confidence, change my attitude to education, make friends'. Another said 'Cedar's values families.' Pupils work closely with the nearby junior school and with many other schools in Blackburn. The school has national links with other schools in the United Kingdom and international links with schools in the Gambia, Italy, India and Pakistan.

Leadership and management are good. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. She has a clear vision for the school, namely the overall development of its pupils and their care

and welfare. She is well supported by all the staff. Middle managers are aware that the school's system to track academic progress is not used as effectively as it could be to track pupils' progress and plan future work. Governors are highly supportive and have an accurate view of the school's work.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good. Children enter the Nursery with skills much lower than what is typical for their age, and many have delayed language and literacy skills with some not able to speak any English at all. Progress is good especially in improving communication skills. Staff work very hard to support these children by developing opportunities to improve their language skills in both English and their first languages. There are exciting curriculum opportunities such as 'Magic Talk', a strategy which has been developed with the local authority support team. Further support is provided by highly effective bi-lingual support staff who move seamlessly between English and children's home languages while singing nursery rhymes and songs. Observations of the progress children make are recorded in well organised and detailed pupil profile records. Children make excellent progress in their personal development because the school takes very good care of them and ensures they are happy and safe, particularly when working and playing outside. These enhanced personal skills give them the necessary tools to take advantage of all that is on offer as they move to Key Stage 1. Overall standards are well below average at the end of the Reception class with weaknesses in communication, language and literacy, and numeracy. The newly appointed Early Years Foundation Stage manager is aware of the needs of learners and has started to introduce strategies to improve standards, but this development is at a very early stage and has not as yet had time to impact on children's learning. The Nursery and Reception classes are currently in separate buildings and opportunities for joint activities and collaboration between staff are limited. Nevertheless, the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum is securely in place across the unit and the school is fully committed to ensuring continuity across the whole phase.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further strengthen links between Nursery and Reception classes.
- Ensure marking, especially in Years 1 and 2, consistently highlights weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and presentation so that children are challenged to do the best that they can.
- Embed the academic tracking system and ensure that all subject leaders make use of assessment information when checking on pupils' progress and planning future work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. From a very low starting point most children gain confidence, develop very good attitudes to learning and make good progress. The excellent support given to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and pupils for whom English is a second language enables them to achieve well; most pupils leave school fluent in two languages.

Teacher assessments at the end of Year 2 have been well below average in reading, writing and mathematics. High levels of pupils' mobility have an impact on standards because many children join and leave the school at different times during the academic year. Nevertheless, standards are rising year on year and are now below average overall with an improvement in reading and

mathematics which are creeping closer to average. Standards are also higher in information and communication technology (ICT) where children achieve much closer to the level expected.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and make good progress. The school's data show that overall girls do better than boys. The school is addressing this by using strategies and resources designed to engage boys' interests and enthusiasms.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The spiritual, social, moral and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and what they need to do to maintain a healthy lifestyle. For instance, pupils describe school lunches as 'really tasty' and are able to identify healthy food options. They enjoy opportunities to be involved in the life of the school and feel their views are taken seriously. For example, school councillors have recently been involved with choosing toys to improve the nursery provision. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding both in class and outdoors. Any isolated incidents of bad behaviour are said by pupils to be 'made better' by teachers. Pupils know that they can approach staff, who will provide them with support and comfort at all times: 'my teacher really helps me when I feel sad' is a typical comment. Pupils keenly support national charities and have close links with schools from different areas both in the United Kingdom and abroad. Pupils' attendance is satisfactory. The school operates a flexible policy on extended leave taken by children to visit families abroad. However, they are expected to continue to learn and are given learning packs including diaries. On their return, they must contribute to a 'welcome back' assembly with an electronic slide show of their experiences. Pupils' preparation for the next stage of their education is satisfactory. They are confident and enthusiastic and have good ICT skills but weaknesses in written work are a disadvantage.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are characterised by excellent relationships, respect and trust between adults and pupils. Planning is good and ensures that pupils make progress in their understanding and enjoy their work. Teachers are good at open-ended questioning and use information very well to enhance learning. Very good teamwork between teachers, learning support and bi-lingual assistants ensures every child feels valued and included whatever their level of English. Children are encouraged to be independent learners; they move between different activities efficiently and waste no time. Lesson objectives are shared at the beginning of lessons but not always revisited at the end of the lesson to reinforce and clarify learning.

Marking is variable. Pupils are frequently praised for their work but expectations are not always high enough of spelling, punctuation and presentation.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school has successfully developed an exciting and interesting skills based thematic curriculum. It places strong and appropriate emphasis on promoting pupils' progress in reading, writing, numeracy and ICT by interlinking subjects. This provides many relevant opportunities for pupils to transfer these skills across the whole range of subjects offered and ensures that

learning is meaningful. Music and drama and the creative arts are central to the curriculum and play an important part in developing pupils' confidence and self-esteem. A particularly exciting feature of the curriculum is the development of the school's ICT through which pupils and parents can interact with the school. There is, rightly, a strong focus on English and much discussion work is linked to helping pupils with their writing. Teaching programmes are well planned and intervention strategies are well matched to the needs of pupils. The attractive displays around the school provide evidence of the pupils' creative work in art and other subjects. Pupils learn about other faiths and cultures through assemblies, religious education and a well-planned programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides outstanding care and support for pupils. Parents are justifiably confident that their children are well looked after at the school, with one commenting, 'Cedars is a wonderful school – an oasis of caring, learning and nurturing.' Pupils feel valued and secure. They report that incidents of misbehaviour are dealt with swiftly and effectively and know to whom they can turn for help. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and ensure pupils' health and well-being. Exceptionally good use is made of the home and school liaison officer and outside expertise to support the most vulnerable pupils and their families. With the help of staff who liaise with families, the school has been resolute in introducing a range of strategies to minimise absence. The school provides extra and very effective support for pupils with English as an additional language and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This enables them to be fully involved in all activities and make progress commensurate with that of their classmates.

Academic guidance is good. Assessment and tracking procedures are currently being strengthened and developed to ensure a closer view of pupils' progress. However, inconsistencies in marking mean that pupils do not always understand what they need to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed. Under the outstanding leadership of the headteacher, well supported by her deputy and other senior staff, the school is highly focused on raising individual achievement, personally, socially and academically. Staff and governors share the vision for improvement. Diversity is valued and careful planning ensures an excellent contribution to community cohesion in many areas. Locally there are excellent links with the local mosque and families are welcomed into school as often as possible. The school participates in many initiatives in Blackburn and has strong links with other schools in the United Kingdom. International links are fostered through teaching exchanges and contact with many schools, in the pupils' countries of origin. The school is well run. Systems of staff induction, support and development are very effective. Staff are encouraged to learn new skills, lead initiatives and take on new responsibilities. Managers are currently not making enough use of information from the new tracking system to gain a clear view of standards across the school in the areas they lead. Governance is good. Governors have a clear overview of the school, are well informed and immensely proud of their school. The school has taken effective steps to promote improvement

since the last inspection and has a good capacity to make further progress. The school provides good 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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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/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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
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	3

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?	1
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
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**

27 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cedars Infant School, Blackburn with Darwen, BB1 9TH

Thank you very much for welcoming the inspection team in such a friendly manner to your school. We enjoyed our visit very much, and agree with you that Cedar's is a good school. We thought the Reception assembly was excellent. Please thank your parents for writing to us to help us with the inspection. We liked many things about the school and would like to share with you those that particularly pleased us.

You are all really enthusiastic about learning and you work hard so that you make good progress during your time in school. You are friendly and helpful and very considerate of other people's needs. Your excellent behaviour is a credit to you, your parents and your teachers. Your teachers organise wonderful things for you to do and make learning exciting and fun. You are really good at using ICT. All the adults in school take excellent care of you. We like the way your parents are always made welcome in school and the extra classes put on for mums and dads. Your school is well managed and the senior teachers are good at working out what will help you to achieve well and enjoy your learning.

These are the things we have asked the school to do next.

- Organise more activities for children in the Nursery and Reception to do together.
- Give you more help on improving the presentation of your work and making sure you don't make mistakes in spelling and punctuation. You can play your part here by trying as hard as you can to make your work accurate and neat.
- We want your teachers to do more checks on how well you are learning to make sure no one falls behind.

We hope that the presentation you are doing next week about Blackburn will be a great success. Good luck in the future and continue to look after one another.

Yours sincerely

Judith Straw, Marian Thomas and Tony Kingston

Inspectors