

Darwen St Barnabas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119456
Local Authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	327039
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Brian Dower

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	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	143
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 Clive Nattrass
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Howarth
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Knowlesley Road Darwen Lancashire BB3 2JA
Telephone number	01254 702996
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Darwen St Barnabas is a small primary school. It makes provision for children of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The social and economic characteristics of the area it serves are average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is average; that of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Pupils are mostly from White British backgrounds. Few pupils join or leave the school at times other than the start or end of an academic year.

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. Christian values and beliefs pervade its work. Pupils receive excellent care and support and they make good progress academically and in their personal development. The overwhelming majority of parents who returned the questionnaire were fulsome in their praise of what the school achieves and its commitment to their children's well-being.

Standards vary from year-to-year in such a small school from average to above average. There has been a pattern of steady improvement in test results over the last year, particularly in the attainment of the more able pupils. School assessments and the quality of the pupils' work show that standards are above average and that pupils make good progress and achieve well. This is down to good teaching and their good behaviour and positive attitudes to work.

Pupils enjoy school, eat healthily and are active. They say they feel safe and secure and free from any form of intimidation. They play an active part in local community activities and the older pupils help with school routines and are a support to the younger children. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education because they have good basic skills and are confident and self-reliant. Opportunities for pupils to be involved in making decisions about the school are limited.

Teaching and learning are good and benefit from stability of staffing. Work is adapted in lessons to meet the needs of the different ability levels in each class and the needs of all pupils in the two mixed-age classes. Pupils understand how well they are doing and what they must do to improve because teachers' marking is very good. The assessment of pupils' progress is accurate and rigorous monitoring means that weaknesses are dealt with quickly and effectively. Not enough use is made of open-ended questioning to encourage pupils to talk at length about their work and to promote class discussion. The standard of presentation in pupils' books is generally good but a minority of the older pupils struggle to set out their writing, diagrams, charts and graphs with sufficient clarity.

There have been significant improvements in curriculum provision since the last inspection and it is now good. Pupils make good use of their literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects and creative activities are planned across the curriculum. Extra-curricular activities have been extended and do much to extend pupils' understanding of the work they do in lessons and to further their enjoyment and sense of well-being. There is, however, no provision for swimming locally. Also, although whole school singing and the choir's performances are good, the school has little outside help for individual and class instrument tuition. Opportunities for pupils to experience fully the richness of musical culture are therefore constrained.

Leadership, management and governance are good. Several parents commented on the quality of the headteacher's leadership. Her drive has been instrumental in raising standards. The chair of governors has an exceptional understanding of the school and its needs and he is steadfast in lobbying and fighting on its behalf. There are coordinators who have good leadership skills but the monitoring of teaching and learning in some subjects lacks consistency and this has resulted, for example, in opportunities for promoting classroom discussion being missed. The significant improvements since the last inspection demonstrate the school's good capacity to build on what has already been achieved.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Attainment on entry to the Reception class varies from year-to-year but typically, children's skills are at expected levels, except for their communication and language skills which are less well developed. The EYFS is well led and managed and good arrangements are used to induct children so that they settle quickly and soon feel safe and secure. They learn to share and begin to understand the impact that their own actions and words have on others. They make good progress and achieve well because of good teaching and the effective support provided by the assistants. There is an appropriate balance between teacher-directed activities and those that children choose for themselves. By the time they enter Year 1, standards are average and children's language skills have improved. The school is without a designated outdoor play area for these children but a start is soon to be made on its construction. It is also the case that indoor space is restricted. This limits the number of self-selected learning activities that can be organised and therefore the extent of children's experiences.

What the school should do to improve further

- Challenge pupils to talk at length about their work by using more open-ended questions.
- Ensure all subject leadership is as effective as the best.
- Provide further opportunities for pupils to participate in decision-making

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average and the pupils achieve well. In such a small school, the comparison of assessments and results with the national average has to be done with caution. The results of just one or two pupils can significantly affect overall statistics. Over time, the school's results at the end of Years 2 and 6 have varied from average to above average but are on an upward trend. In 2007 and 2008, results at the end of Year 2 were above average, while Year 6 results were average in 2007 and above average in 2008. The school's performance targets were met in mathematics and exceeded in English and science.

The school's assessment records and the quality of work seen in lessons and books show that progress has quickened this academic year. Year 6 pupils are well placed to exceed expected levels of performance in English and mathematics and to maintain high standards in science. Boys and girls achieve equally well. The school has been successful in improving the performance of the higher attaining pupils. There has been a steady increase over the last three years in the proportion of Year 6 pupils attaining at the higher Level 5 or above in English and science. Progress over time and pupils' achievement in relation to their starting points are good. This is particularly apparent in English, given their weak language skills on entry to the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Pupils enjoy school and say they feel safe and secure and free from bullying or intimidation. Attendance rates are slightly above average and unauthorised absence is very low. The behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. There are a few pupils who have difficulty adjusting to school routines but they are managed well and make the same good progress as their peers. The Healthy School Award recognises pupils' good progress in their

physical and social development and the fact that they eat healthily and take plenty of exercise. Pupils know right from wrong and the work they do in citizenship teaches them that with rights come responsibilities. They are involved in a range of school and community activities and are enthusiastic about fund raising for those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils have limited opportunities to participate in decision-making or consultation. This confirms the view of some parents and pupils that more could be done to make the school council an active and influential voice which gets things done. Pupils have good basic skills and the personal qualities to make the most of the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils are attentive and keen to learn. They work well collaboratively. They enjoy the challenge of independent working and speak positively about the opportunities they have for this in information and communication technology (ICT). They say they learn best when work is of a practical nature or when they have to solve problems for themselves. The consistently good teaching seen was geared to these learning styles with the result that the pace of learning was brisk. Pupils see their teachers as approachable and supportive, always generous of their time to help when difficulties arise. Pupils know how well they are doing. They receive very good feedback from teachers' marking which balances encouragement with guidance on how to improve. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They set pupils challenging work. Some parents voiced concerns about pupils' progress in the two mixed age classes. Inspection evidence shows that teachers adapt learning activities well to meet the needs of the different age groups. Pupils in those classes are making good progress. Pupils receive good guidance on how to order and present their thinking logically and clearly in writing. The school is aware, however, that some of the older pupils need further support with this and measures are in place to help them. Good questioning techniques test pupils' understanding but, in some subjects, teachers make infrequent use of supplementary questions to get pupils to reflect further and talk at length about their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. Good progress has been made since the last inspection in giving coherence to pupils' educational experience. This has been done by giving greater prominence to the use of basic skills in all subjects and planning for creative activities across the curriculum. The range of extra-curricular provision has been improved and is now good. These activities are popular and well attended. The school recognises that more could be done to promote music throughout the school in addition to the enjoyable performances of the choir. Opportunities for swimming await the construction of a swimming pool in the locality. There are visits away to broaden pupils' experience and the use of visitors' expertise to promote their personal, social and spiritual development. ICT is used extensively and effectively across the curriculum. There are good arrangements in place to ensure continuity of curriculum provision between key stages within school and then onto the secondary school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The Christian faith is central to the life of St Barnabas, resulting in a welcoming, friendly, caring and supportive school. All who work in there are committed to the principles of inclusion and equality of opportunity. Every Child Matters and is known well by every adult. Good use is made of outside agencies to support those pupils who are vulnerable in any way and those few pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They all make good progress academically and the personal development of many such pupils is excellent. Parental questionnaires strongly agree that children are safe and well cared for in school. Safeguarding procedures meet government requirements. Health and safety audits are conducted on a regular basis and risk assessments carried out when appropriate and particularly for visits away. There have been significant improvements in the assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress as they move through the school, resulting in timely and effective intervention when weaknesses are uncovered. Also, pupils are involved in assessing the quality of their own and each other's work. These are some of the reasons why standards are rising.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership, management and governance are good. The rise in standards and the good improvements since the last inspection testify to the strong leadership of the headteacher. She is supported well by an assistant headteacher and skilled teachers, teaching assistants and the school business manager. Subject leadership is good although there are inconsistencies between subjects in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. Self-evaluation is accurate and appropriate priorities are in place to take the school forward. Governors are knowledgeable and closely involved in the life of the school. They ask the right questions. They are well led by a chairman who is an excellent ambassador for the school. St Barnabas is at the centre of the local community and many pupils are the second and third generation of a family to attend the school. Its strong links with the church, its firm commitment to equal opportunities for every pupil and its success in integrating and providing for vulnerable pupils mean that the school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. It has made good progress in addressing its own priorities for improvement, for example, in improving the quality and consistency of teachers' marking and in the use of monitoring information to track pupils' progress. The school's capacity to build on what has already been achieved is good.

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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

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?	2
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	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	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 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

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	1
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

14 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Darwen St Barnabas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Blackburn with Darwen, BB3 2JA

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me when I inspected your school. I enjoyed the two days I spent with you and only wish I had had more time to see all the interesting things you do. Please tell your parents that the questionnaire returns were helpful and informative.

You go to a good school. I could see from your work in lessons and in your books that you are making good progress and that standards are rising. Your behaviour is good and you are keen to learn. Teachers ensure that you understand your lessons and get the help you need to improve.

The care and thought you give to each other and the way you help those less fortunate than yourselves shows how important the Christian faith is in your lives. I saw happy and smiling faces throughout the two days and shall remember the conversations I had with you.

There are a few things to do to make your school even better. You can help by trying to present your written work as neatly as possible. I have asked that you be encouraged to talk more about your work by explaining how you arrived at correct answers to questions. You could also imagine and talk about different ways of solving problems. The 'What if?' and 'Why?' questions can get you thinking. I also think you could play a greater part in making decisions about the school.

Thank you again for making me so welcome. My best wishes to you all.

Yours sincerely

Brian Dower

Lead inspector