

Darwen St James' Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119457
Local Authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	327040
Inspection dates	22–23 January 2009
Reporting inspector	George Crowther

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)	145
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 David D'arcy
Headteacher	Mr Paul Hawthornthwaite
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	St James' Crescent Darwen Lancashire BB3 0EY
Telephone number	01254 703260

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	22–23 January 2009
Inspection number	327040

Fax number

01254 773989

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average-sized primary school serves an area in which there is considerable social disadvantage. Just over half of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, a high proportion compared with most schools. About three-quarters are from White British backgrounds, with a growing proportion from a range of other ethnic backgrounds, a few of whom are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high. A significant minority of pupils join the school during their primary education creating additional challenges for the staff. At the time of the inspection, an acting headteacher had been in post for two weeks. The school runs a breakfast club that caters for children from the Reception year. The school provides education for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St James' is a good school where pupils achieve well in both their academic and personal development. Many of the children start school with skills that are well below those typical for their ages. Many face considerable challenges in their lives and barriers to their learning. The school is successful in helping pupils to overcome these obstacles so they can make good progress. A key factor in this success is the school's Christian values which underpin the happy, caring and positive environment that supports pupils' learning. A strong emphasis on meeting the needs of each child, good teaching, and a persistent focus on improving pupils' basic skills have led to rising standards over the last few years. All these strengths help pupils to enjoy their education and to succeed. By Year 6, most pupils have improved their skills significantly, are confident learners and well prepared for the future.

Often from low starting points, pupils achieve well to reach standards in Year 6 that are much nearer to those expected for their ages. In Years 1 and 2 interesting lessons, good teaching, and effective support for individual learning needs help pupils to build their skills quickly, particularly in reading and writing. In Years 3 to 6, pupils continue to make good progress. In most lessons, teaching is good, sometimes outstanding, with practical activities that stimulate learning and a strong focus on motivating the pupils to do as well as they can. Occasionally, however, the pace of learning is too slow and pupils are not sufficiently involved in their work. By Year 6, standards are broadly average and the school is sustaining the improved standards seen in the 2008 national tests.

Pupils' personal development is good. When they start school many pupils lack the personal skills to support their learning. By Year 6 pupils clearly enjoy school, are keen to learn and behave well. Relationships are good with pupils showing great respect for each other. A typical comment was, 'Our school is friendly and we all get on well together'. The pupils know how to be healthy and they feel safe and cared for. Older pupils happily take on significant responsibilities in school, such as being play leaders for the younger ones. The good progress most pupils make in their academic and personal skills prepares them well for the future. The curriculum is satisfactory, but a strong focus on English, mathematics and science has led to a lack of breadth, balance and richness in the remainder of the curriculum.

Leadership and management are good. During a time of change the acting headteacher has quickly gained a good understanding of the school's effectiveness. Leaders are successful in sustaining a positive environment for learning and ensuring pupils achieve well. However, during a period when leaders have been firmly focused on improving pupils' basic skills, they have not identified and tackled systematically enough other weaker aspects of pupils' achievement. A core group of governors takes a keen interest in the school and is very supportive. Actions to fulfil statutory responsibilities to promote equality of opportunity and community cohesion are satisfactory. Leaders know what needs to be done next, which puts the school in a sound position to improve its work.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision is satisfactory overall and good in some respects. Welfare requirements are promoted effectively, resulting in a safe and caring environment in which children behave and work well together. The classroom is well organised on a daily basis, but strategic planning from data

analysis and self-evaluation is not sufficiently strong to ensure that weaknesses are identified and relevant improvements made. As a result, children do not make rapid enough progress to compensate for their low starting points. Children are happily occupied in the classroom and have positive attitudes, but there are too few opportunities for them to make choices about their learning. Activities inside and outside keep them busy for a while, but some children stray off task easily and the purpose of each play activity is not always clear enough. School and local authority data show that the children make satisfactory progress overall, from levels well below those expected for their age. By the end of Reception standards are still well below average. Children make good progress, however, in their language learning and personal and social development. Special programmes help children with specific areas of learning, and clearly have a positive impact on achievement. The school's breakfast club caters for some Reception children and provides age appropriate activities within a safe and caring environment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that children in the EYFS are helped to learn in ways that speed up their progress.
- Broaden the curriculum to enrich pupils' learning in a range of subjects.
- Identify more systematically how standards can be improved and weaker aspects of pupils' achievement tackled rigorously.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Standards when children start school are well below those typical for their ages. Despite making satisfactory progress, children leave the Reception year with standards that are well below average. However, the children do make good gains in their communication and social skills that aid their learning as they move into Year 1. Throughout the rest of the school, many pupils' progress continues to be affected considerably by significant barriers to learning. A high proportion of the pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and many face challenges in their lives that disrupt learning. In spite of these factors, pupils make good progress to reach broadly average overall standards in Year 6. Over the last few years, standards in reading and writing have improved steadily in both Year 2 and Year 6, and are now broadly average. Standards in mathematics remain well below average in Year 2, but are broadly average in Year 6. The high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those learning English as an additional language, make good progress because their needs are identified carefully and they receive effective support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school does a good job in nurturing pupils' personal skills. Pupils of all ages enjoy school, have positive attitudes to learning and do their best in lessons. Behaviour is good, and the few pupils who find it hard to behave well consistently are supported effectively. Relationships are very positive with pupils helping others quite spontaneously. Whilst attendance is below average, and continues to be an issue for the school, it is about the same as for schools in similarly challenging circumstances. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, but spirituality is the weakest aspect. Experiences in school, and activities such as taking part in a dance workshop at The Lowry, enhance pupils' social skills and foster a growing understanding of their place in the wider world. Pupils know how to be healthy by eating well and taking exercise. They feel safe in school and know about dangers out of school. Lots of

special responsibilities help pupils to make a good contribution to the school community. Pupils have a good understanding of their local community, but a fairly narrow experience of contrasting communities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching in most lessons and work that is generally well planned to meet individual needs help pupils to make good progress. Learning is best when teachers ensure that pupils are actively engaged in activities. For example, Year 5 pupils learnt a lot about symmetry through a range of practical tasks that held their attention and challenged their thinking. Good relationships and plenty of praise for success are strong features of most lessons, and teachers have good skills in managing and motivating their pupils. The best lessons move at pace, with teachers supplying the urgency that some pupils lack. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning, often supporting individuals or a small group. Occasionally, the pace of learning is too slow because the teacher leads the lesson for too long and pupils are not sufficiently involved. Teachers use informal assessment well to keep track of pupils' progress, and whole-school systems also identify pupils who could be doing better. Assessment is used effectively to identify groups of pupils for extra, targeted support.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets pupils' needs well in English, mathematics and science, but lacks breadth and richness. Around the school, pupils' work on display reflects this. The number of resource walls produced by adults, such as lists of spellings and rules, far outweighs the number of displays showing pupils' creative work. There are also too few links between subjects and pupils have insufficient opportunities to contribute to activities within the local community. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well in many lessons to make learning more meaningful. The curriculum is enriched by visits and visitors. During the inspection, Year 5 pupils were clearly delighted with their exciting experience at a one-day dance workshop at The Lowry. After-school clubs each day provide different activities such as sewing and gardening. Teachers say the drop-in breakfast club has a positive impact on learning by ensuring that pupils are alert and nourished at the start of the school day.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All pupils are well cared for. Adults work diligently to ensure that pupils' emotional and social needs are well met in a secure and caring environment. Good role models and skilful discussion encourage pupils to work and play well together and to help each other. In doing so, staff are actively promoting equality amongst all groups of pupils. The school meets all legal requirements for safeguarding. The daily breakfast club is well run and the requirements of the children's register are met. In classrooms, adults work effectively to give good support for learning. For example, helpful discussions with individuals about their work were seen frequently during the inspection. Observations and assessments are noted so extra help can be given to particular groups. Not all teachers make the best use of written marking to remind pupils about the next steps for learning, though there are examples of highly effective marking in some year groups.

The school works hard to improve attendance, but has a very small group of persistent non-attendees.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management have created and sustained a positive, caring environment in which the pupils enjoy their learning and achieve well. Over the past few years, a strong focus on improving pupils' basic skills has led to rising standards. During a change of leadership, the acting headteacher has quickly gained the confidence of a strong staff team and is maintaining a clear direction for the development of the school. Self-evaluation is satisfactory and leaders have made a good start in identifying how to improve the school. However, some weaknesses in pupils' achievement are not identified and tackled systematically enough. For example, the progress of groups of pupils from ethnic minorities is not monitored rigorously enough to ensure they are achieving as well as they can. Similarly, in correctly concentrating on improving pupils' basic skills, weaknesses in the broader curriculum have not been addressed. Good systems to track the progress of individual pupils enable the school to identify and support those who may be at risk of falling behind. Suitably challenging targets promote pupils' achievement. A core group of governors provides considerable support and has a clear grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors' promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. Whilst the school community has strong shared values, action to equip pupils to live and thrive alongside people from many different backgrounds is less well developed.

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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	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
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?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

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?	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?	3
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	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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	3
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**

26 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Darwen St James' Church of England Primary School, Blackburn with Darwen, BB3 0EY

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we inspected your school to find out how well you are doing. We were struck by the happy, positive atmosphere and the way that everyone goes out of their way to help each other.

When we talked to you and watched you working in lessons, it was clear you enjoy being at school. You told us about all the jobs you do to help the school run smoothly, such as acting as play leaders, and you clearly enjoy these extra responsibilities. You said you feel safe in school because you know the adults look after you. It seems you like almost everything about your school and particularly the interesting work in lessons and the range of activities outside lessons. You behave well in lessons and around the school.

From visiting some of your lessons and looking at your work, it is clear most of you are making good progress. We did find, however, that the youngest children might learn even more quickly than they do at present. Whilst most of you are doing well in improving your skills in reading, writing and mathematics, your work in other subjects is not as good as it could be. You learn well in most lessons and your teachers involve you in lots of practical activities and encourage you to work hard. You say there are interesting things to do at school, and we agree. The Year 5 children who went to the dance event at The Lowry Theatre said it was really good fun, and there are also lots of clubs that many of you attend. The staff do a good job in providing the care and support that helps you to be happy at school. Your acting headteacher and the staff are keen to make your school even better.

We have asked your school to improve your learning by:

- helping the Reception children to learn more quickly
- giving you more opportunities to learn in a range of subjects
- finding out where you have weaknesses in your skills and helping you to improve.

Thank you for helping us with the inspection of your school.

Yours sincerely

George Crowther

Lead inspector