

Blackburn St Thomas' Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119355
Local Authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	327008
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Nigel Cromey-Hawke

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 controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	474
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	Rev Carl Schaefer
Headteacher	Mrs Carolyn Lord
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Newton Street Blackburn Lancashire BB1 1NE
Telephone number	01254 54706

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2008
Inspection number	327008

Fax number

01254 694813

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school in an area of social deprivation. Three quarters of the pupils are learning English as a second language and are predominantly of Indian/Pakistani heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is double the national level. The school provides for Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS) learners. The school has achieved Investors in People, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Mark and Artsmark Gold 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 which has improved significantly since the last inspection. It has strong support from parents and carers and contributes well to local community cohesion. One parent typically commented, 'All the teachers and support staff are enthusiastic, dedicated and committed to teaching to a high level and ensuring that the school progresses to the best of its ability.' Achievement is good because of the high levels of support provided for the pupils, their positive attitudes to learning, the good curriculum, effective teaching, and the outstanding pastoral care.

The headteacher and her staff have taken significant steps over the last two years to improve the quality of teaching. This has brought about improvements in learning, although some areas of writing within the EYFS need further development. All pupils now make good progress through the school and standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are broadly average. Currently, pupils in Year 6 are on track to meet and, in some cases, exceed the challenging targets the school has set.

Teaching is good, especially in English, helped by the large number of highly capable and trained support staff, who provide specialist bilingual support to pupils in the early stages of their school life. This is a real strength of the school. Lessons focus strongly on key literacy and numeracy skills and upon active learning styles. Good use is made of art and music to interest and motivate the pupils. Guidance for individual pupils to help them improve their work is, however, underdeveloped. ICT is well used by teachers and is beginning to promote independent learning and prepare pupils well for their future as adults. The good curriculum supports an understanding of the wider world. Pupils clearly enjoy school, feel safe and valued, and know what it means to lead a healthy life. Their social, moral, cultural and spiritual understanding is well promoted.

The level of pastoral care provided by the school is outstanding and contributes to pupils' good personal development reflected in their attitudes to school, high attendance and positive relations with each other and adults. The school works well with the local community and has growing links with both the business world and Pakistan.

The leadership and management of the school is good. The headteacher provides strong leadership and has a staff which is highly committed and works well to ensure that the school provides a caring and stimulating learning environment where cultural and racial diversity is welcomed and celebrated. The school's self-evaluation is wide ranging and of good quality, although planning sometimes lacks detail. Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and needs of the school, and effectively support it, especially through their links with subject coordinators.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision for children in the EYFS is good. Children enter the Nursery with a range of skills that overall are well below what is usual for their age. There are good procedures for introducing children to school and they settle quickly into the Nursery. A strong feature is the way parents and children are welcomed into school each day by a bilingual teaching assistant who knows the children well. Effective teaching helps children make good progress and develop well. Good assessment procedures are used effectively to identify and address specific needs at an early

stage and to build successfully on what children can do. Consequently, children achieve well. Nevertheless, standards are below the expected level for their age by the time they enter Year 1. The school rightly places a strong emphasis on developing children's personal and social skills and develop a good attitude to school from an early age. Staff take every opportunity to talk to children and encourage them to develop their spoken language skills. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to encourage children to write. The well planned activities and the healthy food on offer in the breakfast club provide a good start to the day. Effective teamwork is a feature of the EYFS, which has undergone a recent change in leadership.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities for children in the EYFS to develop writing skills.
- Further raise standards by giving clearer guidance to individual pupils to help them improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' standards are broadly average and their achievement is good. Pupils make good progress throughout Key Stage 1, especially in literacy. As a consequence, standards have risen steadily over the last two years and are now broadly average. Key Stage 2 paints a similar picture with pupils making consistently good progress, significantly so in mathematics. Overall, standards are now in line with national expectations and some strengths are developing in English. The benefits of long term, bilingual language support are reflected in the good progress and standards achieved by pupils whose first language is not English. This support enables them to reach national expectations by the time they leave school. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make especially good progress because of the quality of support they receive. The past underachievement of girls has been successfully tackled. The robust tracking systems indicate that current pupils will meet, and in English possibly exceed, the challenging targets set this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils consider that school is enjoyable because 'the staff work hard to help them, and to look after them so they can work hard.' As a result, standards have risen significantly. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They say they feel safe, they collaborate well and form good relationships with each other and adults. They show confidence and a willingness to engage in conversation with visitors. Pupils from a range of ethnic backgrounds, girls and boys and pupils of different abilities work and play well together. Behaviour is good in lessons, in the playground and around the school. There are no exclusions. Pupils have a clear sense of how to live healthily and this is reflected in the meals and snacks available to them. They act sensibly and safely. Excellent attendance and punctuality are having a positive impact on learning. Pupils are rightly proud of the contribution they make to their community. As they mature, they take responsibility for others through the many tasks they fulfil across the school. They have a strong voice through the school council and have been instrumental in suggesting improvements to the school environment. Innovative links with local high schools prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education and life beyond school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good, so pupils learn well. The consistent application of the school's 'Golden Rules' promotes good behaviour and a positive attitude to learning and is highly valued by pupils. Teachers' explanations are clear and so pupils know what to do and get on quickly. Work is generally planned well to take account of pupils' previous learning. The generous number of skilled teaching assistants, contributes well to learning. Teachers use many different teaching methods, including practical activities, such as singing times tables, to stimulate pupils' interest and enjoyment and involve them in their learning. Teachers make good use of questions and talking partners to successfully improve pupils' speaking and listening skills. Marking is helpful. Occasionally learning is only satisfactory rather than good when the pace of lessons is slow and pupils are not suitably challenged and involved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and meets the pupils' needs well. The well thought out programme for personal, social and health education encourages and supports pupils' good personal development. Priority is given to developing literacy and numeracy skills and providing extra help where needed, so that most pupils achieve the required standard by the time they leave the school. ICT is used extensively to support learning in other subjects, for example specialist programs are helping some pupils to make good improvements in mathematics and spelling. The curriculum is enhanced by the wide range of well attended clubs and competitive sports available after school. Many visits are arranged to support learning in different subjects, often celebrated through pupils' high quality art work around the school. The school chooses a good range of resources to reflect the school's cultural diversity and to support community cohesion well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Academic support and guidance for pupils are good; pastoral care and support are outstanding. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are rigorous and parents and carers appreciate the support and care which the school provides. The breakfast club provides a good start to the day for many pupils and has helped to improve attendance and punctuality. The experienced and skilled support staff are well led and deployed and provide high quality support for pupils who find aspects of school life difficult. Pupils' needs are identified at a very early stage and specialist support from other professionals is provided where needed. Consequently, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress physically, socially and academically. The school has established systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress though the information is not always used well to help individual pupils understand how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Over the last two years there has been a successful focus upon raising standards in reading, writing and numeracy, and establishing more varied teaching and learning methods. The headteacher has restructured staffing, significantly increased the number of teaching assistants, and provided training for staff to support pupils requiring intensive language support. The school has acted to strengthen community cohesion by involving parents and local residents in such developments, as well as providing them with training and resources for ICT. The headteacher and staff have created a harmonious, inclusive, multicultural environment with outstanding levels of pastoral care and support. As a result, pupils' personal development is good and standards have improved significantly. Despite recent changes in the leadership team, it continues to provide clear direction and subject leaders have taken an increased responsibility for their own areas. Self-evaluation and monitoring of practice is good but the school improvement plan lacks detail. Governors are actively involved in the daily life of the school and carry out their challenge and support functions well.

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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	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	1
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?	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?	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**

1 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Blackburn St Thomas' Church of England Primary School, Blackburn with Darwen, BB1 1NE

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me and my team when we inspected your school. You were very friendly, polite and enthusiastic about what you do. You told us a lot of interesting things about your school and you are clearly very proud of it. St Thomas' Church of England Primary School is a good school. These are the main things we found that are good about your school.

- Your school cares for you and looks after you very well.
- You enjoy school, say you feel safe in it and, most importantly, your behaviour is good. Your attendance is excellent. Well done!
- Those of you who find learning difficult, especially with language, are well supported by the school and you all make good progress.
- You work hard and achieve well because of your positive attitudes and the good teaching, curriculum and care you receive.
- The school is well led and managed and the staff highly committed to making it the best place in which you can learn.

These are the things that we have suggested to your school to make it an even better place to learn.

- Provide more opportunities for you in the early years to look at adults writing in order to help you to develop your own writing skills.
- Give you more guidance individually in lessons to help you improve your work and so raise your standards further.

You can help by telling your teachers how you learn best and if you have any difficulties. You can also help by continuing to attend school, behaving well and working hard, as you do at the moment.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Cromey-Hawke

Lead inspector