



St Stephens Church of England Junior School Blackburn

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119439
Local Authority Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number 291421
Inspection dates 28 February –1 March 2007
Reporting inspector Eileen Mulgrew HMI

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

Type of school	Junior	School address	Philips Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Blackburn, Lancashire
Age range of pupils	7–11		BB1 5PF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01254 52297
Number on roll (school)	262	Fax number	01254 663020
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Irene Watson
		Headteacher	Mrs Eileen Don
Date of previous school inspection	30 October 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Stephen's is a larger than average junior school serving an ethnically diverse area with social and economic disadvantage. The number on roll has increased since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is significantly higher than average, with 81% from different minority groups. Almost half the pupils are of Indian heritage; a quarter is of Pakistani heritage and less than a quarter is White British. A high proportion of pupils speaks English as an additional language and four pupils are at an early stage of language acquisition. This number has increased since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average, as is the proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Stephen's is a good school where standards have improved in recent years. Visitors are welcomed by the happy, smiling faces of pupils and staff. Pupils feel safe and properly cared for, and describe school as friendly and enjoyable. In turn, pupils are courteous, polite and well mannered. For example, when an inspector thanked a pupil for opening a door for them, the little girl replied, 'You're welcome'. Pupils feel safe, have fun and take pride in their achievements. Relationships between all members of the school family are very good and the behaviour of pupils is outstanding. During an assembly, pupils and adults showed evident enjoyment as the message of everyone being special was delivered in a lively and stimulating way. The assembly finished with the school prayer and high quality singing from everyone; the school motto of 'Let peace dwell here' permeates the work of the school. St Stephen's is an inclusive school where all groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the small number of pupils from White British heritage, work and play together in harmony. Parents are very supportive of the school and some travel a considerable distance so that their children can attend.

Teaching is good overall and pupils show high levels of concentration and interest in lessons. Pupils are eager to please their teachers. The good relationships that exist in the school, the positive attitudes of pupils, and the care and quality of teaching was illustrated in one lesson where a group of pupils in a Year 3 class cheered spontaneously when they were chosen to do work with their teacher. The curriculum develops good basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Activities across all subject areas are planned so that pupils have first hand experiences and lessons meet their needs and interests. Themed weeks give pupils opportunities to study topics in depth. Pupils enjoy the many clubs organised for them at lunch time and after school, and sports clubs help them live healthily. Out-of-school visits and the many visitors to the school enrich pupils' learning and broaden their experiences. Suitable tracking systems enable staff to keep a check on pupils' progress, for example, on their overall achievement, behaviour and attendance. However, this checking is not frequent enough nor shared with the pupils as much as it could be. All this means that, although many pupils enter school with skill levels broadly in line with those expected for their age, they make good progress during their time at school so that standards are above average in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6. Progress in mathematics slowed a little in 2006 but the school has identified the reason for this and has taken steps to remedy it.

Leadership and management are good. The unwavering dedication of the headteacher to achieve the best she can for the pupils underpins all that happens in the school. The governing body fulfils its duties satisfactorily and shares the aims of the headteacher. Whilst it is involved in supporting the school, it does not always ask the questions that would give it a clearer view of the areas the school need to develop. The school has made good progress on all issues since the last inspection and provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use regular checks on how well pupils are doing to make sure all achieve as well as they can.
- Strengthen governance so that it challenges more, as well as supports the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school judges achievement and standards to be good and inspectors agree. Pupils enter school with skills broadly in line with those expected for their age, although reading is less strong. At the end of Year 6, standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. A successful whole school focus on raising standards in English resulted in dramatic improvement in 2005, which was maintained in 2006. In the most recent test results in English and mathematics, almost a third of all pupils did better than expected for their age. In science almost half did so. For the last two years, pupils' results exceeded school targets. Overall, pupils from all groups, including the small number from White British heritage, make good progress. Due to well matched support, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and some make very good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are tolerant and respectful of each other, including the small number of pupils from White British heritage. All pupils feel safe and secure in this harmonious setting and achieve good standards of work. Pupils know exactly which adult to go to for help if they feel worried. Behaviour is outstanding. Strong links with the church and engaging assemblies reinforce the school's belief that 'many hearts make a school'.

Pupils enjoy coming to school, with parents readily agreeing this is so. When asked, pupils could not think of anything they wanted to change about it.

Pupils have an understanding of how to follow a healthy lifestyle. They enjoy choosing meals from the healthy school menu. Most of the pupils take part in lunchtime and after school sports clubs leading to a healthy competitive spirit in tournaments. The school council enjoys suggesting ideas to make the school better and contributing to the community; for example, by fundraising for charitable causes, delivering harvest parcels to people in the local area and taking part in the annual 'shoe box appeal'.

Although the school makes every effort to encourage good attendance, attendance remains below national average because of extended holidays taken in term time. Pupils who go abroad for an extended holiday are given cameras and home language books and this helps give an educational focus to the holiday.

Pupils make good progress in developing the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT, and have good attitudes to learning. Pupils successfully take on responsibility as play leaders and house captains and many are keen to do jobs and help in the classroom. However, pupils have limited opportunities to research work on their own.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Pupils enjoy lessons because learning is made relevant and fun. Teaching is usually lively, based on sound subject knowledge, and lessons are planned in detail. Relationships between pupils and teachers are friendly and warm, and expectations of behaviour are high. Learning objectives are shared openly so pupils know what is expected of them. Although teachers do not always set yearly targets for pupils, they have an understanding of what pupils know, can do and understand. Taken together, this fosters positive attitudes to learning throughout the school; in one lesson, a group of pupils cheered when told the class teacher would be working with their group.

In the best lessons, pupils work quickly on lively and interactive tasks that engage and hold their interest. In a few lessons, however, pupils finished work quickly, but were not given anything else to do; this meant that they made less progress than they could have. Additional adults support pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and pupils who speak English as an additional language, carefully and thoughtfully, making sure they contribute fully and benefit effectively from lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is broad, well balanced and meets all statutory requirements. It is adapted to reflect the interests and experiences of all pupils; for example, a text in a literacy lesson described a child's visit to the family in India. This engaged and motivated the pupils, many of whom could relate this to their own experiences. When making vocabulary choices, teachers use pupils' home languages to illustrate vocabulary choice and meaning.

The learning environment is attractive despite serious shortcomings in accommodation. Pupils' high quality, attractively displayed work adorns the walls; for example, a sculpture of witches to link with the study of Macbeth. The very popular art club allows pupils to enhance and enrich the skills they learn in art lessons. The ICT curriculum is used effectively across the school to support learning in other subject areas as well as to develop the pupils' ICT skills. There are themed weeks when pupils study a topic in depth. For example, after the Year 6 pupils designed and made hats, they used a power point presentation to tell the rest of the school and the parents about the process and show the finished product.

There is a good range of activities, which take place at lunch time and after school. These include a variety of sport as well as art clubs, which contribute markedly to the pupils' enjoyment of school and self-esteem. Good use is made of visits and visitors to enhance learning by giving pupils opportunities for first hand experiences, which broaden their knowledge of the world. For example, the Year 6 visited the museum to gain further understanding of their study of the Romans. Careful planning and effective support promote the learning of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and lower achieving pupils, enabling them to make good progress overall.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The school is a happy, friendly environment in which the positive relationships between pupils and adults go some way to making pupils feel supported and safe. Relationships with parents are strong. Detailed risk assessments are in place and are reviewed regularly by the school's health and safety committee, including for the school site. Procedures to safeguard pupils follow government guidelines; these include rigorous systems for checking adults working with pupils. The headteacher has undertaken training in safer recruitment and child protection procedures are in place. Guidance on academic progress is not as strong as that for pastoral support but it is being developed. End-of-key stage target setting and tracking of progress are in place but more regular checking would allow all pupils to be made aware of the precise next steps they need to take in order to improve their work and make even more progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management of the school are good. The very experienced and caring headteacher leads the school with purpose, direction and enthusiasm. She is restless in her determination to achieve the best she can for the pupils. She is supported by an equally caring and dedicated deputy headteacher and senior leadership team. Middle managers are fully involved in development planning and together the school has an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. They are committed to placing pupils' needs and equal opportunities at the heart of school life. As a result, the school has developed a successful approach to raising achievement. The governing body fulfils its statutory duties satisfactorily and is involved in all major decisions about the school. The governors know the strengths of the school but are less aware of the areas for development. As a result, not all governors offer the challenge to the school expected of them. Links with external agencies, such as the educational welfare service, support pupils' learning effectively. Although good use has been made of the accommodation, for example, in the provision of small areas for group work, capacity to improve will be enhanced when the planned new school buildings are commissioned.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

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 disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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 the 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

¹ Grade 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.

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

St Stephen's CofE Junior School

Philips Road

Blackburn

Lancashire

BB1 5PF

1 March 2007

Dear Children,

We thoroughly enjoyed our visit to your school. You all looked so smart and ready to learn as we joined you for your assembly. You made us feel very welcome and we enjoyed meeting and talking with you. We especially enjoyed the chocolates offered to us by the children celebrating their birthdays!

Your parents are very pleased with your school and are happy for you to go there. Inspectors agree with them. Everyone works together to give you a good start to your education. St Stephen's really is a 'family' school.

These are the things we found best about your school:

- *you have a good headteacher who wants to give you the chance to 'be the best you can be'
- *all the adults look after you very well
- *you are polite, friendly and well behaved
- *you have lots of fun
- *in lessons, you show how much you want to learn.

We have asked your teachers to check on how well you are doing more frequently.

We have also asked the governors of your school to ask your headteacher more questions so that they will know how they can help you more.

We hope you continue to enjoy your learning at St Stephen's.

Best wishes for the future,

Eileen M Mulgrew Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools

Angela Charlton Additional Inspector

Yvonne Clare Additional Inspector