

Meadowhead Junior School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 119121 |
| Local Authority | Blackburn with Darwen |
| Inspection number | 301684 |
| Inspection dates | 5–6 December 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Kathleen McArthur |

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

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| Type of school | Junior |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 7–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 304 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Alan Holderness |
| Headteacher | Mrs Frances Stevenson |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 March 2003 |
| School address | Anglesey Street Blackburn Lancashire BB2 4QG |
| Telephone number | 01254 209871 |
| Fax number | 01254 201753 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This junior school is larger than most primary schools and is situated in an area of social and economic deprivation. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is twice the national average. The percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than average. A small number of Traveller pupils attend the school when their families are in the area. The new headteacher has been in post for almost a term.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. The new headteacher has brought a fresh spirit to the school, and made positive and vital changes with a very firm focus on improvement. She quickly recognised the need to act rigorously to raise standards and eradicate a legacy of underachievement by older pupils. Working closely with senior leaders, staff and the local authority, she has introduced robust strategies to implement her vision for improvement which are already making an impact. Parents are very supportive of the school and several made comments praising both the headteacher and staff. The school welcomes and provides well for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Achievement is now satisfactory overall, and standards are broadly average. Closer liaison with the infant school has ensured a much more accurate assessment of pupils' capabilities when they enter the school and consequently of their progress. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement in standards. In 2007, standards were below average especially in writing, and in mathematics, most particularly for pupils in Year 6. Work seen during the inspection indicated that pupils currently in Year 6 were making at least satisfactory progress, and often made good progress in lessons.

Personal development is good. Pupils say everyone in school is friendly so they are very happy and feel secure, safe and valued. Good relationships between staff and pupils ensure behaviour is good. Pupils understand how to care for their health and appreciate the 'worry box' where they can share problems in confidence and know they will be listened to. Pupils are keen to contribute to their school and to participate in local community activities. Undertaking responsibilities, such as school councillors, 'Zoneparc' leaders or running the daily fruit shop, prepares pupils satisfactorily for their future. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are considerate and kind towards others, reflect on their behaviour and emotions, appreciate all activities in school and are very aware of the needs of children in a different culture. Attendance is broadly average; a small number of families find it hard to ensure their children attend regularly.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. A much stronger focus on learning has improved progress, particularly for the younger pupils. Examples of good practice were seen during the inspection; where teaching was lively and challenging, and pupils had effective targets, they made good progress. However, expectations of what standards pupils can achieve are not consistently high and there is not yet enough good teaching to fully eradicate the legacy of underachievement in Year 6.

The curriculum is satisfactory and is enriched well by extra activities. It is becoming more effective through the themed creative days when there are links between subjects. However, some subjects are taught in blocks of time and long gaps between subjects, for example in science, means knowledge and skills are not reinforced regularly enough. Pupils can choose from a wide range of clubs and extra activities, some held at lunchtime, others after school. Pastoral care is good, and parents are pleased their children are well cared for. Systems to track and monitor progress are satisfactory but are not always used consistently to check what pupils have learnt and what further support is needed.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The strong emphasis on teamwork is enabling leaders, at all levels, to contribute fully to the drive for improvement. This is showing in the increased progress made by all pupils and the effective personal development. Governance is

satisfactory. Governors are very supportive, and are now developing the knowledge and skills with which to challenge the school. There has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection and the school has satisfactory capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics.
- Accelerate achievement by the end of Year 6.
- Raise all teachers' expectations of what their pupils can achieve.
- Ensure teachers use assessment information consistently to pinpoint exactly what pupils need to do to improve their work.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are now broadly average. When pupils start school, they have generally typical standards for seven-year-olds. However, some struggle to retain these standards as they enter a new school. Standards have fallen over the last four years and pupils did not make enough progress so there was underachievement. In the 2007 national tests, pupils missed their targets, particularly in mathematics. Low scores in writing badly affected results in English; reading scores were better. The new headteacher acted swiftly to halt the decline, accelerate progress and raise teachers' expectations of what their pupils can achieve. Pupils now know what they are going to learn, are keen to beat their targets and are learning to check if they have succeeded. One said, 'I like it because you get lots of hard work.' Pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 are making satisfactory progress and assessment information shows they are on track to meet targets appropriate to their capabilities. There is still some underachievement in Year 6, where pupils are not as well advanced as many others of their age. However, in the lessons observed, pupils made satisfactory and often good progress. Assessment information shows they are on track to meet the 2008 targets. Pupils generally listen carefully in lessons but speaking skills are below average. Sometimes, teachers talk for too long, which limits opportunities to improve these oral skills and many pupils struggle to explain their answers or reasons. This hinders their ability to organise their thoughts and to express themselves in writing. In informal situations however, older pupils express their views confidently and often articulately. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress at least as well as their classmates in relation to their starting points.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. The good programme of personal development ensures pupils learn to understand their own feelings. They show care and kindness towards others in school and in the wider community. Good behaviour indicates they can make informed choices about right and wrong, and they show respect for adults and concern for their environment. Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe there.

In lessons, very good behaviour helps pupils concentrate and learn independently or cooperatively in groups. Pupils adopt safe practices because rules are clear and they know what

is expected of them. Effective use of praise and rewards builds self-esteem so pupils feel valued, respected and keen to try harder. They know they need to eat healthily and exercise; the new 'Zoneparc' play equipment is very popular and administered most efficiently by Year 6 pupils. Pupils develop an increasing sense of responsibility; school councillors feel really involved in decision-making in the life of the school. Raising money for charity and recent visitors from Africa gave pupils a growing sense of the wider world community. These experiences with academic and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are suitable preparation for secondary school. Attendance is satisfactory; the school makes every effort to work with families who find it difficult to get their children to school regularly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. A significant proportion of good teaching was observed during the inspection and, in these lessons, pupils progressed well. Pupils learn best when teaching is lively and well paced, and work is well matched to their needs. Some teachers have high expectations of their pupils and challenge them to do better. Most lessons are well organised and make good use of all resources, for example, the laptop computers. Lessons are now planned to an agreed format so pupils know exactly what they are going to learn and how to check if they have succeeded or need extra help. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution, particularly for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, in a significant number of lessons, teachers talk too much so progress slows and pupils lose concentration. Assessment information is not used consistently to see exactly where pupils need help. In some lessons, pupils are allowed to work too slowly; they do not complete enough work so progress is slower.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets all statutory requirements. It is suitably adapted with well-targeted support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is now a stronger focus on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Pupils develop literacy skills in other subjects, for example, writing about Henry VIII in history. Pupils said they enjoy the 'Creative days' where pupils of different ages work together on a particular topic, for example the recent French Day. Some subjects are organised into blocks of time rather than being taught each week. However, long gaps between, for example, science work can mean that knowledge and skills are not reinforced regularly enough. A good programme of personal and social development gives pupils good opportunities to consider their health and their feelings and make sensible choices. Consequently, pupils are well behaved and considerate towards others. Extra activities that enrich the curriculum well include visits to local industry, and pupils really appreciate the variety of clubs held both at lunchtime and after school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall. Pastoral care is good. Parents appreciate this, and trust the school to look after their children well. Pupils feel safe and well cared for in school, and find all the adults approachable; good relationships with staff aid learning. Pupils

reflect the way they are cared for by caring for others: one said, 'We make new pupils feel welcome, and we try to be kind to anyone who feels lonely or left out'. Robust arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet all current requirements. Well established health and safety procedures ensure pupils work in a safe, secure and stimulating environment.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and the school makes full use of every external agency, especially to help the most vulnerable pupils. Academic guidance is satisfactory and is used to set pupils' appropriate targets. There are inconsistencies in the way information about how well pupils are doing is used to pinpoint exactly what they need to do to improve their work and to match activities to different learning needs. Good examples of teachers' marking were seen; pupils' efforts are celebrated and clear steps show pupils how to further their progress. However, this practice is not consistent in all year groups.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The new headteacher accurately and rigorously evaluated the school's performance. She formed an experienced senior leadership team, and challenged staff and governors to raise their aspirations for the school. There is now a firm commitment to improving standards and accelerating progress. This is already proving successful; achievement is now satisfactory in Years 3, 4 and 5, and Year 6 pupils often make good progress in lessons. Subject leaders take a more active role in the drive to raise standards and the school has benefited from valuable support and guidance from the local authority.

Performance management procedures set staff challenging targets appropriately linked to the issues for improvement and progress towards these is regularly monitored. The quality of teaching and learning is checked regularly. However, this is done informally, as a formal structure has yet to be finalised. Governance is satisfactory. Governors understand the need to raise standards quickly but are only just acquiring the knowledge with which to hold the school to account. Effective links with the nearby infant school and with the local high school ensure pupils transfer confidently to the next stages of their education. Good partnerships with support agencies benefit pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

| | |
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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 3 |
| 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 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 3 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 3 |

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| How well 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 | 3 |

The quality of provision

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|--|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 3 |
| 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? | 3 |

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 3 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 3 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 3 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 3 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 3 |
| 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

10 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Meadowhead Junior School, Blackburn, BB2 4QG

We would like to thank you all for welcoming us when we visited your school. Everyone we met was very polite, friendly and helpful so we enjoyed spending time with you. Your parents told us that they are happy with the school. It was good to see you outside enjoying the 'Zoneparc', and we were very impressed with the way the play leaders organised the equipment. We heard about your visitors from Africa and know you decided to help their school. The school councillors should be proud of the work they do to help you all.

Here are some of the things we found out:

- your school is satisfactory, and the teachers help you reach standards similar to most schools
- you behave well, especially in lessons. The school makes sure you are all safe and that you are caring and kind to others
- you told us you enjoy the work and there are lots of extra activities and clubs that make school work more interesting.

The headteacher, staff and the governors want to improve your school. We have asked them to:

- challenge you all to do even better and make sure you reach higher standards in mathematics and English, especially in your writing
- help you make faster progress, especially in Year 6
- make sure they know exactly where you need help to improve your work.

You can help them by always working really hard, doing your best and continuing to enjoy everything you do at Meadowhead Junior School.

All the inspectors send you their best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Kathleen McArthur

Lead inspector