

Inspection of St James' Church of England Primary School

Off Stopes Brow, Lower Darwen, Darwen, Lancashire BB3 0QP

Inspection dates:	29 and 30 October 2024
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils, and children in the early years, love being members of this caring and friendly school. Their well-being is at the heart of all aspects of the school's work. Pupils know that staff are always there to talk to. They appreciate the many opportunities that they have to discuss their feelings, views and concerns. Through their roles as 'peer mentors', pupils help to look after the well-being of others at lunchtimes. Pupils unanimously said that the school is a happy and safe place to be.

Pupils behave well. They benefit from a calm and purposeful atmosphere in lessons and around the school. Pupils value the rewards that they receive in recognition of their positive learning behaviours. This includes having 'tea at three' with staff.

Pupils feel honoured to be members of the 'pupil voice groups'. They take their responsibilities seriously and are proud of the difference they make to the school and to the local community. For example, in their roles as 'courageous advocates', pupils raised money for charities.

Pupils strive to live up to the school's high expectations for their personal and academic achievement. Pupils achieve well across a broad curriculum.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils, and children in the early years, access a rich and engaging curriculum. In the main, the school has identified the important knowledge that pupils should learn and has ordered this logically from the Reception class to Year 6. However, in some areas of the early years curriculum, this process is still being refined. In these aspects of learning, the knowledge that children should learn has not been identified precisely enough. This makes it difficult for the school to check that the curriculum in the early years is consistently building on what children know and can do.

The school identifies and meets the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities well. Staff attend training and work closely with a range of professionals to ensure that pupils receive effective, individualised support. The school ensures that adaptations to the delivery of the curriculum are made to enable pupils to progress well through the curriculum.

The curriculum is delivered well by staff. Activities enable pupils to deepen their learning and to apply their skills. In most subjects, the school makes precise checks on how well pupils are learning, which helps staff to identify any gaps in their knowledge. However, in a small number of subjects, the school is at an earlier stage of developing these processes. In these subjects, the current processes do not enable the school to effectively identify how securely pupils are building their knowledge.

The school fosters a love of reading and ensures that pupils develop the skills to be able to read fluently. Pupils, and children in the early years, access a wide range of books. They value the daily opportunities that they have to hear teachers read to them. The

school's phonics programme helps pupils to rapidly learn the sounds and letters that they need to begin to read. The school provides effective support to help pupils to catch up quickly when they find reading difficult. Typically, pupils achieve well in reading from their starting points.

Pupils at St James' are enthusiastic and confident learners. They are keen to contribute their ideas in lessons and take pride in their work. Children in the early years develop their independence and resilience as staff encourage them to problem-solve. The school has high expectations for pupils' attendance. It has developed a range of strategies to ensure that parents and carers understand the impact of not attending school on their child's learning. The school identifies the causes of any absence and takes effective action to improve pupils' rates of attendance.

The school supports pupils' personal development. It builds positive relationships with parents right from the transition processes into the Reception class, which supports children to quickly feel safe and settled. Pupils enjoy attending a range of clubs, such as art, baking, choir and sports. They learn how to keep themselves safe from potential hazards, including online. Pupils have a clear understanding of the school's values and how they link to the fundamental British values. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Governors have ensured that they have supported the school and considered staff's well-being and workload during the recent changes in leadership at St James'. They know the school well and hold leaders to account across all aspects of the school's work effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some areas of learning in the early years, the curriculum is not broken down into the components of knowledge that children should learn. This makes it difficult for the school to ensure that the delivery of the curriculum helps pupils to build on previous learning. The school should continue its work to refine the early years curriculum so that it is clear how children's learning will build securely and will prepare them well for Year 1.
- In some subjects, the school's checks on how well pupils are learning are not as precise as they could be. This means that the school is not able to effectively evaluate the impact of the curriculum on pupils' progress, or to use the information gained from this to inform subsequent learning. The school should ensure that assessment systems enable staff to fully understand how well pupils are learning the curriculum across all subjects.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	119503
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	10348181
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	196
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Andrew Cole
Headteacher	Melissa Tindall
Website	www.stjameslowerdarwen.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	25 and 26 September 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has experienced considerable changes to leadership since the previous inspection. A new headteacher was appointed in November 2024.
- The school is a voluntary-aided Church of England primary school and is part of the Diocese of Blackburn. It was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 in 2017. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight school years.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision for pupils.
- The school operates a breakfast club.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school’s education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other leaders, governors and a range of staff at the school. The lead inspector spoke with representatives from the local authority and the diocese.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils’ work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils’ interests first.
- The lead inspector listened to some pupils read to a known adult.
- Inspectors observed pupils at breaktime, lunchtime and when moving around the school.
- Inspectors spoke to parents and considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors spoke to pupils and to staff to gather their views. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted’s online surveys for staff and for pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including those related to the governance of the school.

Inspection team

Liz Dayton, lead inspector

His Majesty’s Inspector

Steven Rooney

Ofsted Inspector

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