

Inspection of Darwen St James CofE Primary Academy

St James Crescent, Darwen, Lancashire BB3 0EY

Inspection dates:	9 and 10 July 2025
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Inadequate

The headteacher of this school is Laura Peckson. This school is part of the Cidari Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Peter Ashworth, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John McClelland.

When Darwen St James CofE Primary Academy was inspected in February 2023, it was judged to require special measures. Subsequently, the school was inspected on two occasions. At the last monitoring inspection, leaders were judged to have made progress to improve the school, but more work was necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to attend this school. They enjoy positive relationships with their friends and staff. Pupils know that the school expects them to behave well. Peer mediators support pupils to enjoy positive breaktimes. Most pupils are respectful and kind to each other. This makes pupils happy.

Pupils are starting to benefit from the school's higher expectations of what they can and should achieve. They are now experiencing a more ambitious curriculum. Nevertheless, many of the improved curriculums are in the early stages of being taught. Pupils in key stages 1 and 2 have gaps in their knowledge, which are sometimes not identified or addressed swiftly enough. In addition, some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do not receive the support that they need to succeed. Pupils' learning across a range of subjects is uneven as a result. Conversely, children in the early years benefit from well matched support. They develop curiosity, independence, and enjoyment in their learning.

Pupils enjoy a range of experiences beyond the academic. This includes clubs, such as dance, drama, and netball. Pupils also benefit from trips to beaches, parks, and residential visits. These opportunities capture their interests. The school supports pupils to become responsible and active citizens through leadership roles such as being members of the school council.

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

Darwen St James is a school on a journey. Since the previous graded inspection, it has managed considerable change to staffing while maintaining a focus on the most important aspects of school improvement. It has raised its ambition for pupils. However, it has not realised this ambition in full.

Children in the early years now benefit from an effective curriculum. They are well prepared for the challenges of key stage 1. The school has also introduced new and more aspirational curriculums for older pupils. However, beyond reading and mathematics, much of this work is in its infancy. It has not had time to have an impact on pupils' learning. Pupils continue to have gaps in their knowledge from the previous weaker curriculums, including in writing. In addition, the school does not consistently check that pupils' understanding is secure before moving on to new learning. As a result, pupils in key stages 1 and 2 continue to develop gaps in their knowledge. They do not achieve as well as they should.

Subject leaders play an increasingly active role in providing staff with support and guidance about the subjects that they teach. Consequently, teachers deliver the intended curriculum increasingly well. Some subject leaders are at an earlier stage of this work, however. In these subjects, staff are less confident in designing learning that effectively helps pupils to learn the more ambitious subject content that is now in place.

The school has prioritised the teaching of reading. Children in the Nursery class, including those in the two-year-old provision, are supported to develop their communication skills from the start. This helps to prepare them well for learning letters and their corresponding sounds as soon as they enter the reception class. Popular 'reading café' sessions provide opportunities for the sharing of favourite stories with parents and carers.

The school has provided staff with appropriate training to develop their expertise in the teaching of phonics. Staff keep a close eye on pupils' reading and provide support for any pupils who struggle to keep up. Those pupils who need help to read receive effective support. As a result, pupils' fluency and confidence in reading is improving.

The school has strengthened its systems to ensure that the needs of pupils with SEND are identified swiftly. However, the school is at an early stage of supporting staff to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of these pupils. As a result, some pupils with SEND do not access some aspects of the curriculum well. This prevents these pupils from achieving as well as they could.

Most pupils display positive behaviour across the school. Pupils who sometimes struggle to regulate their own behaviour benefit from sensitive support from staff. The school helps these pupils to manage their emotions.

The school has identified the reasons for the low attendance rates of some pupils. It takes swift and effective action to provide support for these pupils and their families. As a result, pupils' rates of attendance are improving.

Pupils learn to understand the importance of treating everyone equally, irrespective of any differences that they may have. Staff support pupils to develop strategies to support their mental and physical health. Pupils also learn about the importance of healthy relationships and active lifestyles.

The trust, local governing committee and leaders share a determination to continue the school's journey of improvement. Trustees and governors provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge to leaders. Morale is high. Staff feel well supported. Leaders understand what steps it should take to improve the school further.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Improvements to the design and quality of many of the school's curriculums, including writing, are fairly recent. It is too soon to see the full impact of this work. This means that pupils have significant gaps in their knowledge and do not remember what they have learned as well as they should. The school should make sure that the new

curriculums are implemented consistently well so that pupils gain a strong body of knowledge in the longer term.

- At times, the school does not use the information that it has about the needs of pupils with SEND to adapt the delivery of the curriculum as effectively as it should. This hinders how well some pupils with SEND learn. The school should ensure that staff use the information available to them to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of pupils with SEND.
- The school has not ensured that some pupils' misconceptions or gaps in learning are addressed before they move on to new learning. This means that some pupils' learning is not as secure as it should be. The school should check that pupils have successfully embedded the prior knowledge that they need before they move on to learning new content.
- Subject leadership of some areas of the curriculum is at an early stage of development. As a result, some subject leaders lack at the necessary skills and confidence to drive further improvements in their subjects. The school should provide these curriculum leaders with the expertise and knowledge that they need so that they are equipped to lead their curriculum areas effectively.

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	140891
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	10318239
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	197
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John McClelland
CEO of the trust	Peter Ashworth
Headteacher	Laura Peckson
Website	http://www.darwenstjames.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	5 and 6 November 2024, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Cidari Trust.
- The school is part of the Diocese of Blackburn. The last section 48 inspection took place in May 2025. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place in the academic year 2029 to 2030.
- The school provides education for two-year-old children.
- The school runs a breakfast club for pupils.
- The school makes use of one registered alternative provision for a small number of pupils.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a graded (section 5) inspection under the same Act. 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.

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors looked closely at some subjects, including English, mathematics, geography, and physical education. They spoke with subject leaders and staff about these curriculums. Inspectors also visited lessons, spoke with pupils, and reviewed pupils' work.
- The inspectors also considered pupils' learning in other subjects.
- The lead inspector observed pupils from key stages 1 and 2 read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other school leaders. The lead inspector met with members of the board of trustees, including the CEO of the trust. She also met with members of the local governing committee, including the chair of governors.
- The lead inspector met with a representative of the local authority, a representative of the diocese and with the registered alternative provision currently used by the school.
- Inspectors met with the leaders responsible for attendance, behaviour, early years, the provision for pupils with SEND and pupils' personal development.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their experiences of school. They looked at a range of documents related to pupils' welfare and education. They also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and around the school. There were no responses to Ofsted's online surveys for pupils.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff. Inspectors also spoke with staff and school leaders to gather their views about their workload and well-being.
- Inspectors met with parents at the start and end of the school day and during a reading event that took place during the school day. They also took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.

Inspection team

Rebecca Jewitt, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sarah Midgley

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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