

Blacko Primary School

Address: Blacko Primary School, Gisburn Road, Blacko, Nelson, Lancashire, BB9 6LS

Unique reference number (URN): 145816

Inspection report: 8 September 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders have the highest of expectations for pupils' attendance. They have developed a shared culture where high attendance is everyone's responsibility. Leaders monitor attendance rates with precision. They are alert to the smallest change in any pupil's attendance levels. Staff ensure that early attendance concerns are dealt with sensitively but effectively. As a result, attendance rates have remained above the national average over time. Persistent absence is well below other schools nationally. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities also attend school regularly.

Leaders have successfully developed an ethos that is highly conducive to learning. The behaviour system is very well designed. It is underpinned by high expectations and warm and respectful relationships between staff and pupils. Staff seamlessly model these expectations consistently and effectively. Pupils proudly rise to meet leaders' high aspirations for their conduct. Their behaviour is extremely positive. They consistently follow the school rules, with very little need for any reminders. Pupils have very positive attitudes to their learning and to each other. They work and play harmoniously together. Any unkind behaviour, including bullying, is not tolerated. Staff deal with any issues effectively and swiftly.

Early years

Strong standard ●

Leaders have expertly crafted an aspirational curriculum that meets the needs of children very well. Very well-trained staff deliver the curriculum with enthusiasm. This sparks children's curiosity and their desire to learn.

Even before children start school, staff begin to work in partnership with parents and carers so that they can quickly identify any children with particular needs. Staff act swiftly to ensure that any children who need extra support get the help that they need. This means that children with additional needs can access the same learning as their classmates.

The early years is a happy and purposeful environment. Children relish the many opportunities that they have to learn and play both indoors and outdoors. Staff skilfully engage children in 'back and forth' language interactions throughout the day. This supports children to develop their vocabulary and deepen their knowledge and skills across the 7 areas of learning.

Staff pay the same attention to children's emotional security and safety as they do to their learning. Nurturing staff ensure that children are safe, well cared for and happy.

By the time children leave the Reception class, they have mastered important early skills in reading, writing and mathematics. They develop strong knowledge across all areas of learning, which is reflected in the higher-than-average proportion of children who reach a good level of development. Children are extremely well prepared for key stage 1.

Inclusion

Strong standard 

Inclusion is at the heart of leaders' work. They have an unwavering commitment to ensuring that pupils with additional needs are swiftly and accurately identified. Highly trained staff put into place strategies to help pupils overcome any obstacles to their learning or wellbeing at the earliest opportunity. This includes pupils who have previously been in the care of the local authority and disadvantaged pupils.

Staff carefully utilise the information that they receive from specialist staff to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities very well. They make well-judged adaptations to their teaching to help pupils with physical, sensory and emotional needs to learn successfully alongside their peers.

Leaders are alert to any other pupils who may need help at a particular time. For example, pupils who may be experiencing difficulties at home. Staff provide practical and emotional support to these pupils and their families.

Leaders make highly effective use of any additional funding, including the pupil premium grant. Well-delivered strategies enable disadvantaged pupils to achieve well both academically and across the wider curriculum.

Leaders maintain meticulous oversight of the school's provision for pupils with additional needs. They check the impact of their work. They adjust support accordingly. As a result, pupils consistently benefit from high-quality experiences that successfully reduce any obstacles to their achievement.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard 

Leaders, trustees and members of the local governing body have the highest of aspirations for pupils. Staff at all levels share leaders' ambitions. A positive culture permeates through all aspects of school life.

Leaders ensure that pupils benefit from a high-quality education and that they achieve well. Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They focus on the right priorities. Leaders forensically analyse the impact of their work to consistently bring about improvements.

Staff are unwavering in their support of the school's leadership team. They appreciate how leaders and the trust go out of their way to be mindful of their workload and wellbeing. Staff greatly value the way that leaders and the trust invest in their professional development through the school's successful coaching programme. This helps staff to continuously develop their skills and to further their careers.

Trustees and members of the local governing body hold the school to account extremely well for all aspects of its work. They fulfil all of their duties with diligence, showing high levels of commitment.

Parents and carers cannot praise the school highly enough. They feel a highly valued part of their child's education.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

By the end of Year 6, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is consistently above the national average. Pupils successfully acquire key skills in early English and mathematics. This is reflected in pupils' positive results in the Year 1 phonics screening check and in the Year 4 multiplication check. However, there are a small number of pupils who still have some gaps in their early handwriting skills.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve very well from their individual starting points in terms of their academic learning and in their growing confidence and resilience. Disadvantaged pupils also achieve well.

Across the rest of the curriculum, pupils generally develop secure knowledge. However, some pupils do not show detailed and deep knowledge across all areas of the curriculum over time. Overall, pupils are well prepared for their next stage of education.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The school's curriculum is ambitious and meets the needs of pupils well. It has been carefully designed to cater for pupils being taught in mixed-aged classes. The knowledge that pupils should learn is outlined in a logical order. This supports pupils to build on their prior learning in small, achievable steps.

Leaders have embedded a carefully crafted coaching programme that enables staff to deliver the curriculum well overall. Staff typically explain concepts to pupils effectively. Teachers introduce and explain new vocabulary explicitly. In lessons, staff typically check that pupils are gaining key knowledge. However, some strategies that teachers use to check how well pupils have remembered their learning over time are sometimes less effective.

Staff have the same high aspirations for pupils with additional needs as with other pupils. Teachers skilfully use strategies to enable pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to experience success in their learning.

Leaders prioritise the securing of pupils' skills in early reading, writing and mathematics as quickly as possible. However, a small number of pupils struggle to develop fluency in their handwriting skills. In the main, most pupils successfully gain the skills that they need to help them with later, more complex learning.

Leaders prioritise pupils' personal development alongside their academic learning. This supports pupils to become well-rounded, active citizens who are well prepared for later life. Leaders have carefully taken into account the experiences and needs of pupils in designing their personal development programme. They have carefully woven in a purposeful relationships and sex education and health education curriculum to ensure that pupils benefit from a cohesive learning programme.

Leaders ensure that the programme is an entitlement for all pupils, regardless of their needs or circumstances. Leaders track pupils' participation and make adjustments to ensure that vulnerable pupils equally benefit from the school's offer.

Pupils enjoy a rich breadth of extra-curricular provision. Trips and visits are planned purposefully to enhance curriculum learning and to broaden pupils' horizons. Pupils have opportunities to take part in sports, the arts, science and technology and cultural experiences. These activities build pupils' interests, talents and confidence. Pupils enjoy participating in the 'Apex Champions' programme. This trust initiative encourages pupils to try new activities such as bowling on the green and French cricket.

Pupils learn about fundamental British values in action such as democracy through voting for pupils to join different leadership groups. Diversity and equality are promoted through assemblies, books and special days such as International Women's Day. Pupils also learn about showing kindness through projects such as 'Be More Laura Day,' which fosters compassion and collective responsibility.

Leadership roles such as house captains, school council, reading ambassadors, eco-warriors and playtime buddies provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop responsibility, confidence and communication skills.

Leaders place a high value on providing pupils with effective pastoral support so that they thrive in school. Pupils understand that they need to look after themselves both physically and mentally. They know how to keep themselves safe when working online. They understand the importance of healthy eating, as well as the changes that take place during puberty.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils are immensely proud of their school. They describe it as 'small but mighty'. Pupils enjoy highly positive relationships with staff and their peers. They feel safe and very well looked after.

Pupils love coming to school. They appreciate the opportunities that they have to participate in school life. Children in the early years get off to a great start. They delight in their learning and play. Children quickly grow in confidence.

Whatever their background or need, pupils are positively embraced and warmly welcomed into school. This helps pupils to develop a deep sense of belonging. Pupils look forward to

coming to school each day. They attend extremely well. Pupils know that staff will deal with any rare incidents of bullying fairly and very effectively.

Leaders have successfully developed a shared culture of high expectations that are firmly rooted in the school's values of ambition, respect and collaboration. Pupils' conduct consistently embodies these values. They behave impeccably well. This starts in the early years where children quickly learn the school rules and routines.

Typically, pupils develop secure knowledge across the curriculum. They consistently attain above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics in national tests and assessments. Staff make sure that any barriers to pupils' progress are reduced effectively. As a result, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities progress very well from their starting points. Disadvantaged pupils also achieve well.

Leaders place the same high priority on pupils' wider development as on their academic success. Pupils benefit from a rich menu of extra-curricular activities. These experiences help to bring their learning alive. Pupils enjoy taking on important roles in school. These include working as 'buddies' helping children in the Reception class and being part of the school council and eco-committee. As a result, pupils are well prepared both academically and socially for the next stage of their education.

Next steps

- Leaders should further build on their assessment systems for checking on pupils' learning so that they develop and remember detailed knowledge across the curriculum in the longer term.
 - Leaders should continue to embed the refinements to the writing curriculum so that the small number of pupils who struggle with their handwriting quickly develop fluency in their early writing skills.
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About this inspection

This school is part of the Apex Collaborative multi-academy 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), John Tarbox, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Marie Burnham.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This inspection took place on 8 and 9 September 2026.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other leaders and staff. The lead inspector spoke with the CEO, the chair of trustees and members of the local governing body, including the chair of governors. They also spoke with a representative of the local authority.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school uses no alternative provision

Headteacher: Kate Richards

Lead inspector:

Louise McArdle, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Jeanette Westhead, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This was the data available at the time of the full inspection, taken from [different sources](#). More recent data may have been published since the full inspection took place.

 The inspector(s) used this data during the full inspection on 8 September 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

103

Well below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 268

School capacity

105

Well below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

2.91%

Well below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years.

National average: 26.5%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

2.91%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 4.1%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

9.71%

Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational needs support at the school.

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Well below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English indices of deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in a combined reading, writing and mathematics measure.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	83%	61%	Above
2024/25 (final)	75%	62%	Above
2023/24 (final)	93%	61%	Above
2022/23 (final)	80%	60%	Above

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	90%	74%	Above
2024/25 (final)	83%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	100%	74%	Above
2022/23 (final)	87%	73%	Above

Pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	88%	72%	Above
2024/25 (final)	92%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	93%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	80%	71%	Above

Pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	88%	73%	Above
2024/25 (final)	92%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	93%	73%	Above
2022/23 (final)	80%	73%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		46%	
2024/25 (final)	S	47%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	46%	S
2022/23		44%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		62%	
2024/25 (final)	S	63%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	62%	S
2022/23		60%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		59%	
2024/25 (final)	S	59%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	58%	S
2022/23		58%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		60%	
2024/25 (final)	S	61%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	59%	S
2022/23		59%	

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, including the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		68%	
2024/25 (final)	S	69%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	67%	S
2022/23		66%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		80%	
2024/25 (final)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	80%	S
2022/23		78%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		78%	
2024/25 (final)	S	78%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	78%	S
2022/23		77%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		80%	
2024/25 (final)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	79%	S
2022/23		79%	

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	2.7%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	3.4%	5.5%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	2.8%	5.9%	Below

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	1.1%	13.0%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	1.1%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	2.2%	16.2%	Below

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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