

Lower Heath CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	123483
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	380665
Inspection dates	11–12 July 2012
Lead inspector	Gordon Ewing

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	92
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Delwyn Davies
Headteacher	Cathy Rutherford
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2009
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Gordon Ewing

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector visited 10 lessons, observing five teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders and staff, members of the governing body, and groups of pupils. Informal discussions were conducted with some parents and carers, and with pupils. The inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised documentation, including the systems for assessing and monitoring pupils' progress, pupils' work and teachers' planning and marking. Policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils were scrutinised. The inspector also took account of questionnaires completed by 60 parents and carers, 15 staff and 44 pupils.

Information about the school

Lower Heath is smaller than the average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average, with the very large majority of pupils being of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is very low. The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs, is above average; predominantly, these pupils have speech, language and communication needs or moderate learning difficulties. The proportion of pupils joining the school, other than at expected times, is high.

The school meets the current floor standards, which set the government's minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

The governing body manages a daily after-school child-care club for up to 10 pupils, called 'Activity Zone'. This provision was included in this inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Lower Heath is a satisfactory school where pupils, rightly, see themselves as part of a close family and where a collective spirit permeates the school's work. It is not yet good because, until recently, the rate of progress has not been consistent or good enough to secure the levels of attainment of which pupils are capable. This is particularly the case in pupils' writing. Furthermore, targets and teachers' marking do not provide pupils with clear information about how to improve, and independent learning skills are insufficiently developed. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Achievement over time is satisfactory. Until recently, all groups of pupils made satisfactory progress, and their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Years 2 and 6 has been broadly average. Current pupils are making stronger rates of progress because recent steps to improve teaching and the tracking of pupils' achievement are paying dividends so that inconsistencies across the school are being eliminated.
- The quality of teaching is satisfactory and improving. Effective performance management and targeted staff training are addressing issues of variability in the quality of teaching. However, pupils are set learning targets, particularly in literacy and numeracy, that are not precise enough to challenge them individually. Teachers' marking, though positive and timely, does not consistently provide pupils with focused guidance on how to take the next step. Pupils are not given enough opportunities to extend their independence and their skills in using a range of reference tools are under-developed.
- Behaviour and safety are good and, sometimes, outstanding. Pupils' positive attitudes and enthusiasm for learning are reflected in their high levels of attendance.
- The sensitive and good leadership of the headteacher, supported by a

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committed governing body, is now taking effective action to eradicate inconsistencies in teaching and in holding teachers more closely to account for the progress of individual pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' levels of attainment and progress in writing so that, by July 2013, they reach similar levels to those they achieve in reading and mathematics, by:
 - providing further guidance to teachers on the key components of effective extended writing
 - improving strategies and the range of opportunities for pupils to extend their writing skills across the curriculum
 - ensuring that levels of challenge in all writing activities are closely matched to pupils' needs and interests.

- Improve learning targets and the way assessment is used to support learning, including teachers' marking, so that pupils understand how well they are learning and how to improve further, by:
 - sharing existing good practice in teachers' marking and ensuring that teachers give accurate and timely next step comments to help pupils move forward in their learning
 - setting more individualised targets in literacy and numeracy with sharply focused time goals
 - holding regular review meetings with pupils, involving them in evaluating their progress and in setting their next learning target.

- Increase pupils' independence in their learning, so that they apply a wide range of skills to best effect, by:
 - coaching pupils so that they independently use strategies to check and evaluate their work accurately
 - equipping pupils with the key skills to use reference tools, such as information and communication technology (ICT), thesauruses and encyclopaedia in a wide range of learning situations
 - ensuring that all learning environments are designed to allow pupils to have regular access to a wide range of reference tools and resources.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Almost all parents and carers believe that their children make good progress at the school. To some degree, this is justified because attainment is now rising more consistently across the school. Achievement over time is satisfactory and, until this year, pupils reached broadly average levels of attainment by the end of Year 6 from

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similar starting points. An increasing proportion of current pupils are achieving levels above those found nationally in English and mathematics because the school's focused drive to improve teaching is having a sustained impact. Within this positive picture, pupils' progress in writing does not consistently match those levels being achieved in reading and mathematics. Activities to develop pupils' extended writing skills are not always closely matched to their levels of ability or interests.

Children in the Reception class make a positive start to their education because induction procedures ensure that their needs are swiftly identified and learning activities are tuned to challenge and engage them. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers, both personally and academically. This is because adults provide a caring and supportive climate in which they can develop as individuals. Pupils new to the school settle in quickly and soon make up any lost ground because teachers are diligent in identifying their individual learning needs and providing personalised support. By the end of Years 2 and 6, pupils' attainment in reading over time has been broadly average. Levels of attainment in reading for current cohorts are improving because the school's approach to teaching phonics (letters and sounds) is increasingly systematic and consistent.

Pupils enjoy practical activities and respond well to the challenges presented to them through teachers' good questioning and the broad range of learning activities on offer. For example, in a mathematics lesson in Years 5 and 6 where pupils made good progress, they were thoroughly focused on using percentages to calculate the price of goods in a sale or after allowing for value added tax. Solving real-life problems brought added relevance to their learning. Pupils demonstrated growing levels of confidence and skill in using calculators judiciously, alongside mental strategies, to tackle the challenging activities presented to them. They worked very effectively in pairs and responded enthusiastically to the well-judged questioning and intervention of the teacher.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching, taken over time, is satisfactory. The teaching of reading is satisfactory. The proportion of good teaching is now increasing so that pupils' current achievement is rising convincingly. Some inconsistencies still exist, however, but effective strategies are already paying dividends in securing better practice.

The positive climate for learning created by adults is boosted further by pupils' enthusiasm and desire to learn. Teachers' planning is thorough and usually takes account of the varying needs of their pupils so that most activities are appropriately matched to pupils' stage of learning. That said, opportunities are sometimes missed for pupils to apply their developing writing skills in a wider range of contexts. The quality of teaching and support to disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is good. Teaching assistants are often effectively deployed in most lessons and their support to individual pupils is sensitive and effective in moving them forward. This was evident where teaching was good in a lesson in Reception/Year 1 where

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pupils were studying two- and three-dimensional shapes. The teacher worked closely with some pupils to assess and develop their understanding of the key features of a range of shapes. The pupils used mathematical vocabulary such as 'vertex', 'edge', 'cylinder', 'prism' and 'cuboid' with confidence and accuracy. The teaching assistant worked effectively with another group, skilfully building pupils' understanding of two-dimensional geometric shapes through play and focused questioning.

A strong feature of the teaching is the dialogue between pupils and teachers, both on a one-to-one basis and through teachers' marking. This consolidates pupils' learning and boosts teachers' existing knowledge of individual pupils' needs. Consequently, the teaching increasingly makes a positive contribution towards pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Within this positive picture, teachers' marking does not consistently give pupils effective guidance in how to move their learning forward or in re-setting learning targets at an individual level. As a result, opportunities to accelerate learning and develop greater independence are not as frequent as they should be. Pupils' competence in using reference tools such as dictionaries, thesauruses, encyclopaedia and ICT is under-developed and suitable resources are not always easily accessible around the learning environment. Pupils are not consistently taught how to check their own work in order to avoid unnecessary errors or to evaluate their progress against the learning objectives provided at the start of the lesson. This limits further pupils' opportunities to exercise greater independence in their learning and reduce their reliance on adults.

Almost all parents and carers express the view that pupils are taught well. While this is increasingly the case now, inspection evidence, including pupils' achievement over time, shows that, though broadly satisfactory and improving, inconsistencies remain in some of the teaching across the school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents and carers consider that pupils' behaviour and safety are good. Inspection evidence supports this view. The school's high expectations and positive relationships help to create an environment that is conducive to promoting learning and ensuring pupils' safety. This is equally the case in the 'Activity Zone' after-school club. High levels of attendance and punctuality reflect pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Consequently, the strong relationships and attitudes to learning boost the impact of the teaching. One parent said, 'My children love coming to school and skip in through the gate everyday.' Another wrote, 'I feel that my child is being well educated in a stimulating, caring and supportive environment.' Pupils see themselves as part of a cohesive family where mutual respect and tolerance are key components of the school community. Though the pupils do not have a school council, they take on a range of specific responsibilities within the school and feel that it is important that everyone plays a part. This is the case, for example, in pupils monitoring the friendship tree to see if anyone feels lonely or is in need of a hug. Pupils demonstrate good knowledge of different types of bullying, for example, cyber and prejudice-based

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bullying. Bullying is rare and mainly of a name-calling nature. Pupils report that adults respond very swiftly and decisively when worries or concerns are brought to their attention. A key strength is the way in which 'talk partners' are used sensitively and effectively in lessons and assemblies to build cooperative learning, explore ideas and develop pupils' speaking and listening skills.

Leadership and management

The headteacher's effective leadership has ensured that the school is moving forward with ambition and vigour. She is well supported by the assistant headteacher and middle leaders. Recent steps to increase the impact of pupil progress meetings and to track pupils' achievement more closely are now bearing fruit. This is reflected in strengthening levels of attainment and achievement as well as improvements in teaching. Inconsistencies remain but the school's accurate self-evaluation and well-informed improvement plan are setting a focused agenda for the future. Pupils' writing has rightly been identified as a key area for improvement in the school development plan. Though attainment in writing is improving, there is still more to do in providing pupils with activities that help them apply and reinforce their extended writing skills across other areas of the curriculum. Staff morale is high and systematic performance management, supported by targeted training, is increasingly effective in raising teachers' expectations and in improving pupils' attainment. Taking into account these factors, alongside recent improvements in pupils' achievement, the school is well placed to advance further.

Pupils enjoy a broad, balanced and diverse curriculum that offers them memorable experiences and effectively promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Opportunities to learn French and participate in a re-enactment of the Queen's coronation in the Abbey bring added vibrancy to pupils' experiences. Pupils have a strong moral compass and, at times, reflect on their lives and learning with precision and understanding. Procedures for safeguarding pupils and staff are rigorous and effective. Any form of discrimination or inequality is tackled quickly and pupils, themselves, have a clear understanding of self-worth and that of others.

The governing body is developing strategies to track the work of the school and its impact on outcomes for pupils even more precisely. Its members have a good understanding of the school's main strengths and weaknesses. They have played a key role in improving aspects of the school's provision, for example, in developing the outside learning environment for pupils in the Reception/Year 1 class.

Almost all parents and carers said that they would recommend this school to another parent or carer.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

13 July 2012

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Lower Heath CofE Primary School, Whitchurch, SY13 2BT

Thank you for the wonderful welcome you personally extended to me when I carried out the recent school inspection. I really appreciated the opportunity to talk with many of you and to read the questionnaires that some of you completed for me. Your excellent attendance and positive attitudes to learning clearly demonstrate that you enjoy your time at Lower Heath.

I found that you go to a satisfactory school that is improving well because it is helping you to learn even more, especially recently. I was so impressed with your good and, sometimes, outstanding behaviour and you evidently care for one another in lessons and at play. You demonstrate, through the way you share ideas and listen to each other, that you have strong respect for the views of others and you find working with a 'talk partner' valuable in helping you to learn. Especially recently, your progress in reading, writing and mathematics has been improving but I know that you can achieve even more, especially in developing your extended writing in other subjects. Your teachers are going to help you achieve this by improving the range of writing experiences in the future.

You clearly make the most of the opportunities the school provides, whether it be learning French or taking part in a re-enactment of the Queen's coronation. I judge that you can achieve even more with additional help from your teachers, so I have asked Mrs Rutherford, the other staff and the governors to set you more challenging and individualised targets in reading, writing and mathematics and to help you develop your skills in using reference tools, such as ICT, to increase your independence in learning. This will help you become less reliant on teachers and provide you with more opportunities to set yourself learning targets and to undertake increasingly more challenging and diverse tasks. You have already demonstrated to me your willingness and eagerness to learn. By continuing to show such positive commitment, you will help the staff and governors in making Lower Heath an even better place to learn.

I wish you every success at Lower Heath and in your future lives.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Ewing
Lead inspector

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