

Lowther Endowed School

Hackthorpe, Penrith, Cumbria, CA10 2HT

Inspection dates 26–27 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Lowther is at the heart of the local community and highly valued by pupils, their families and staff.
- Pupils get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and make good progress during their time at school.
- Any weaknesses arising since the previous inspection have been successfully tackled by the headteacher and governors. As a result, the school is rapidly improving.
- Results in the Year 6 tests in 2013 show a big improvement compared to the previous year when standards declined. A higher proportion than the national average achieves the higher levels in English and mathematics.
- The teaching of reading is extremely effective. By the time pupils leave in Year 6, they are very competent readers and well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Overall, teaching is good and some is outstanding. Pupils are keen to learn and enjoy the wide range of activities in lessons.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work well as a team to provide good guidance and advice to help pupils with ways to improve their learning.
- During the inspection, pupils' behaviour in and around the school was good and school records show that this is typical. Pupils feel happy, safe and secure.
- The headteacher has developed a strong team of staff and volunteers who are dedicated to pupils' personal and academic development.
- A new tracking system has been introduced to measure precisely and regularly how well pupils are progressing.
- The governing body provides a good balance of support and challenge. Together with the headteacher, it is concentrating on raising the quality of teaching even further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching. Occasionally, there is not enough challenge for the middle-ability pupils.
- Teachers do not always adapt activities quickly enough when pupils find work too easy or too hard.
- There is a lack of consistency in the quality of marking across the school.
- The role of some subject leaders is not yet fully developed. Some are at an early stage in measuring progress for their areas of responsibility in order to raise achievement.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed six teachers and visited eight lessons, one of which was observed jointly with the headteacher. In addition, the inspector made a number of short visits to lessons and listened to pupils read.
- Discussions were held with: school staff; groups of pupils; senior staff and leaders with responsibility for a specific subject; governors; parents and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation including safeguarding documents, the school's procedures for gaining an accurate view of its own performance, its development plans, records of pupils' standards and progress, documents relating to attendance and behaviour, and pupils' work in their books.
- The inspector took account of the 25 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 15 responses to the inspection questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Naomi Taylor, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Lowther is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is lower than that found nationally. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and children who are looked after.
- The number of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well below the national average.
- Pupils are mainly taught in four classes. A lower-school 'unit' comprises of two classes with pupils from Reception and Years 1 and 2. Years 3 and 4 are taught together as are Years 5 and 6.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2012. More than half the teaching staff joined the school within the last 18 months.
- A new governing body has been formed since the previous inspection.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching in order to sustain and accelerate progress by ensuring that:
 - teachers are consistently providing challenge throughout the whole lesson and increasing the opportunities for pupils to find out things for themselves, particularly the middle-ability pupils
 - teachers quickly adapt lessons when pupils find the work too easy or too hard
 - the quality of teachers' marking is further improved so that pupils are clear about how to improve their work.
- Improve leadership and management further and so continue to raise pupils' achievement by developing the role of some subject leaders in enabling them to check on their areas of responsibility and make necessary changes in a timely manner.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Links between school, home and nurseries are good and this helps children settle quickly into school routines in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 unit. Most children start school with skills that are in line with those typically expected for their age. Children do well in the Early Years Foundation Stage and this continues in Years 1 and 2. They now join Year 3 with attainment levels which are higher than those typical for their age in reading and mathematics and in line in writing.
- In the 2013 Year 1 reading test, almost all pupils achieved the expected level, which was a huge improvement on the previous year. More than the national average attained at the higher level in reading at the end of Year 2.
- From standards in Year 6 that declined dramatically in 2012 to well below national averages in English and mathematics, the school's actions have led to secure improvements. The proportion reaching the higher levels in writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 was higher than the national average in 2013. This is due to a more systematic approach to teaching writing and mathematics, as well as an increase in pupils' opportunities to apply their numeracy and literacy skills in other subjects and through topic work. The number of pupils reaching the higher level in reading was significantly above the national average.
- In 2013, the proportion of pupils making expected progress and better than expected progress in writing and mathematics was in line with national figures. The proportion of pupils making expected and better than expected progress in reading was higher than the national average. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education. Progress is now more consistently good across all year groups. This shows the rapid improvement that has taken place in the last 12 months.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make the same good progress as their classmates because of timely and sharply focused help from teachers, teaching assistants and external agencies. The most-able pupils and pupils from minority ethnic groups are provided with the right level of challenge to help them make good progress.
- Those pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil-premium grant made similar progress to their peers in reading. Their attainment in reading and writing was higher than the national average for this group but it was lower in mathematics. These pupils are generally a term behind other pupils in school in writing and two terms behind in mathematics. However, the gaps in attainment between pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and other pupils in the school are narrowing, which demonstrates the school's commitment to the promotion of equal opportunities.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Because the headteacher is prioritising improvements in teaching and learning through training opportunities for staff, teaching is generally good throughout the school and some is outstanding.
- In the best lessons, teachers and teaching assistants plan activities very well together to ensure pupils are given work that matches their abilities and enables them to find things out for themselves. Consequently, pupils learn rapidly.
- Younger children learn effectively how to link letters and the sounds that they make (phonics). Phonics is effectively taught in small groups based on pupils' abilities.
- Outstanding teaching and progress were seen in a lesson with Reception and Year 1/2 pupils. In small groups, pupils were immersed in learning as they embarked on preparing a potion to make a giant smaller. Younger pupils were practising their phonics and writing skills by using giant paintbrushes outdoors to write their labels while older pupils were creating a potion and writing down the ingredients. All showed great enthusiasm and a determination to complete their tasks,

and outstanding progress was made.

- Occasionally, there are missed opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding of what they are doing, challenge ideas and find out things for themselves. Although teachers plan work to suit the range of pupils' abilities, tasks are not always matched precisely enough for pupils to reach their full potential, particularly the middle-ability group.
- In a Key Stage 2 mathematics lesson, activities were initially well planned to meet the needs of the wide range of ability in the class. However, as the lesson progressed, some began to find the tasks too easy and others too hard and the teacher did not adapt the lesson quickly enough.
- Although pupils' work is regularly marked, there are inconsistencies in the quality of marking across the school and in the time given in lessons for pupils to improve their work.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are well trained to provide support for the individual learning needs of pupils with special educational needs and those known to be eligible for the pupil-premium funding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- When children join Lowther, they learn from an early age how to value one another, the adults around them and their school community. There is a strong atmosphere of mutual respect.
- On a questionnaire, one member of staff wrote that this is 'a happy school with such great children and caring, friendly and supportive staff'. Parents and the inspector support this view.
- Pupils say they feel very safe in school and this is reflected in responses from parents who told inspectors that behaviour is much better than it used to be, and is good. Pupils are successfully taught how to measure risks and choose good behaviour, and why it is important to do so.
- The quality of artwork displayed in school reflects the pride that pupils take in their work. The assemblies encourage pupils and staff to celebrate hard work and achievement.
- Pupils understand different forms of bullying but say that it is rare at the school. They told the inspector that they would be able to talk to any adult if they thought that this was happening to them or someone else. Incident logs show that there have been few incidents of bullying or poor behaviour.
- Older pupils enjoy various roles and responsibilities; this was seen during breaktimes, when they run the tuck shop, and lunchtimes, when they distribute play equipment. The school council organises a range of fundraising activities for local, national and international charities.
- Pupils' experiences are extended through a range of well-managed excursions. Visits to Liverpool and Outward Bound centres take pupils beyond their home environment and provide valuable social and cultural experiences for them.
- The primary school sport funding is being allocated towards pupils and staff working with external coaches and investing in new equipment. This is encouraging pupils to lead healthy lifestyles and it promotes pupils' well-being.
- During the inspection, a sports coach was teaching Key Stage 2 pupils and staff the techniques and rules for playing lacrosse. Some pupils told the inspector that they had never heard of this sport before they came to school, yet several were enthusiastically preparing for a competition with other schools.
- Pupils' attendance is broadly average and improving.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has a good understanding of how to drive whole-school improvement. She has introduced effective systems to check on pupils' progress. Some subject leaders are relatively new and still developing their roles to check the quality of teaching within their areas of responsibility but are totally dedicated to furthering school improvement.
- The headteacher and governing body have identified the right priorities and put actions in place to ensure more stability in staffing and improvements to the quality of teaching. Effective use of

systems and procedures to check on the quality of teaching has eradicated inadequate teaching. The local authority has effectively helped with this. There is clear evidence of improvements to the quality of teaching.

- A local network of schools, instigated by the headteachers, provides good opportunities for staff at all levels to share good and better practice and this has contributed to rapid improvements across the school.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is strong thanks to a creative curriculum delivered in and beyond school. Artwork, musical performances and engagement in sport all contribute to the pupils' engagement with the local community and a strong teamwork ethos. Developing pupils' first-hand experience of other cultures and religions is a current focus of the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - All members of the governing body are committed to continually improving this school. Governors ensure that the school fulfils its statutory responsibilities; all staff have been checked for their suitability to work with children and trained appropriately to keep pupils safe. Governors have an accurate overview of what the school does. They are familiar with performance data and are aware of the quality of teaching in the school. They ensure that teachers' appraisal and salary progression are linked and dependent upon teachers meeting their targets. Governors hold the headteacher to account for school improvement. They check that effective use is made of the pupil-premium funding, ensuring gaps between groups of pupils are rapidly narrowing. This demonstrates their commitment to equality of opportunity for all pupils.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	112342
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	426314

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	93
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sylvia Evans
Headteacher	Gill White
Date of previous school inspection	5 May 2011
Telephone number	01931 712344
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