

Lowton St Mary's CofE Voluntary Aided Primary School

Newton Road, Lowton, Warrington, Cheshire, WA3 1EW

Inspection dates 26–27 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Achievement is good and has continued to improve since the previous inspection.
- Children start school with skills and abilities below those typical for their age. Almost all Year 6 pupils made the progress expected of them in all subjects last year and the majority did better than this in reading and mathematics.
- Standards in reading and mathematics are now high by the end of Key Stage 2, and in writing they are in line with the national average.
- Disadvantaged and disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs achieve well because of the high quality support they receive.
- As a result of very effective, well-planned and imaginative teaching, children in the early years do extremely well in all areas of learning. They are very well prepared for the move to Year 1.
- Pupils are very proud of their school. They are polite and welcoming and are keen to learn. Behaviour is good in class and around school.
- A strong Christian ethos permeates all the school does. Pupils feel safe and valued and make a good contribution to the life of the school.
- Senior and middle leaders have an accurate view of the school's performance and are determined to make the school even more successful. They make regular checks on teaching and provide good guidance for staff. This is bringing about ongoing improvements in teaching and pupils' achievement.
- The well-informed governing body provide effective support and challenge for school leaders.
- The curriculum is varied and captures pupils' interests well. It is enhanced by a range of extra-curricular activities and enrichment opportunities.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Progress in writing in Key Stages 1 and 2 is not as rapid as it is in reading and mathematics.
- Opportunities to develop the basic skills in writing are sometimes missed when pupils write in other subjects.
- Pupils are not always given enough time to make corrections or act on advice given in marking.
- Sometimes the work set in writing is too easy and pupils, including the most able, do not know what they need to do to reach the higher standards.
- Teachers do not always demand enough work from pupils, especially the most able, when they write independently.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons or parts of lessons.
- The inspectors also looked at examples of pupils' work and listened to pupils read. They observed the teaching of reading skills and talked to pupils about the books they have enjoyed and those that they are currently reading.
- Inspectors talked with pupils as they played at break times, and visited the dining hall at lunchtime. They observed pupils' behaviour as they moved around school.
- Meetings were held with three groups of pupils and inspectors spoke to pupils about their work.
- Inspectors met with four governors. They spoke to a representative of the local authority, an external consultant who works with the school and met with members of school staff.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the start of the school day. They took account of 17 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the school's analysis of questionnaires issued to parents. Inspectors also took account of 15 responses to the staff questionnaire completed during the inspection.
- A number of documents were examined, including information about pupils' progress and school improvement.
- Records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding were also scrutinised.

Inspection team

Lyn Pender, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Maureen Hints

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is similar in size to most other primary schools. The number of pupils on roll fluctuates because the number of children attending the Nursery class varies from year to year. Children in the Nursery class attend part time and those in the Reception class attend full time.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is just above that in most other schools.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for support through pupil-premium funding is below average. (This additional funding is provided for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.)
- The school has recently experienced significant changes in staffing. In the last academic year a number of staff were absent for sustained periods and at the end of that year a number of staff left the school. Since September 2014 the school has been led by a headteacher partnership. The substantive headteacher now works for three days each week. The deputy headteacher has now assumed the role of co-headteacher. She has full responsibility for the school on the other two days. At the time of the inspection the majority of the teaching staff were new to the school with five teachers joining the staff in September 2014.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Before- and after-school and holiday clubs are provided on site by private providers. These provisions are subject to separate inspections.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching to raise pupils' achievement in writing to outstanding by making sure that teachers:
 - make clear to pupils, particularly the most able, exactly what they need to do to improve their writing
 - provide pupils, particularly the most able, with work that is hard enough to consistently deepen and improve writing skills
 - raise their expectations of pupils' written work when they write independently
 - provide pupils with opportunities to develop their basic writing skills when they write in other subjects
 - provide pupils with time to make corrections and use the advice given in marking to improve their written work.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership and management are good. Since the last inspection senior leaders have successfully maintained a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and raising pupils' achievement. As a result standards have continued to rise.
- The appointment of a significant number of new staff this year has strengthened teaching further. The headteachers provide robust leadership and are working closely together to forge new and existing staff into a strong team. The school has good capacity to continue to improve.
- Teachers and other adults build warm, positive and respectful relationships with pupils. A purposeful culture has been created where all can succeed. Discrimination of any sort is not tolerated and all are treated equally.
- Senior and middle leaders regularly check the quality of teaching and use the outcomes to identify training needs for staff. Teachers' pay is linked to the achievement of pupils. All leaders, including governors, have an accurate view of the school's strengths. School plans identify the correct priorities and actions needed to bring about further improvements.
- Pupils' progress is tracked carefully and senior and middle leaders use this information to carefully target any pupils at risk of underachievement. The pupil premium is being used to provide extra teaching and pastoral support for disadvantaged pupils. It is very effectively closing the gaps in attainment between these pupils and others.
- The school has prepared well for the recent changes to the curriculum. The curriculum is focused on developing pupils' thinking skills. Topics begin with questions that challenge pupils to recall what they already know and what they want find out. Arranged into themes that capture pupils' interests, the curriculum contributes well to spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Music is an important aspect and all Key Stage 2 pupils learn to play a musical instrument. A wide range of trips and visits enrich the curriculum and deepen pupils' understanding of the topics they are studying. For example, pupils had the opportunity to learn about how the country is governed during a visit to the Houses of Parliament where they met the local Member of Parliament. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The primary school sports funding has been deployed effectively to provide additional opportunities for pupils to develop their sporting skills and participate more regularly in activities.
- Almost all parents who spoke to inspectors were overwhelmingly positive about the school and how it cares for their children. Many said they appreciate the way that staff know their children well as individuals. Parents find it helpful that they are able to speak to class teachers before school each day and many take the opportunity to share brief information about their children. Weekly newsletters provide plenty of useful information and helpfully shows the homework set for each class.
- The local authority provides appropriate light-touch support for this good school. Local authority staff supported the governors as they took the decision to allow a period of shared headship in the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors share the co-headteachers' and staffs' high aspirations and expectations for the school. Appropriate action has been taken to stabilise staffing after the teacher absences experienced by the school last year. The current arrangements for shared headship have appropriate reviews built in to enable governors to check that the leadership and management of the school remain effective.
 - Governors have a good understanding of the school's performance because they receive regular reports from leaders and gain first-hand views during visits to the school. Minutes from governing body meetings show that governors hold the school rigorously to account.
 - Governors make sure that checks on staff performance are thorough and that leaders and teachers are set challenging targets which are linked to the progress made by pupils.
 - The governing body has a clear overview of school finances. Governors regularly check that the pupil premium is having a positive impact on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
 - Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Governors ensure that this aspect of the school has a high profile. For example, a pocket card has been produced for parents to inform them about how the school ensures that pupils are kept safe. It shows parents the steps to take if they have any concerns about the safety of children.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are friendly, polite and well mannered. They enjoy school and thrive in its welcoming, positive and caring atmosphere.
- Behaviour is good in class and around school. Pupils play well together at break and lunchtimes and are kept safe and happy. They are well motivated and their positive attitudes make a good contribution to learning in lessons. Learning is strongest when pupils are set work which is hard enough to make them think and where they are clear about what they need to do next to improve.
- Pupils make a good contribution to the life of the school. All belong to a school house which is led by an elected captain. Throughout the year they raise funds for their chosen house charity. The 'Ethos Group' helps pupils share the values which underpin all that happens in the school. This group has led assemblies and has shared its work with pupils from another school.
- All know the school rules well and pupils think that the adults apply these fairly. Many awards are available including the role of VIP, a reward for excellent behaviour and hard work, which is much sought after.
- Attendance has continued to improve since the previous inspection and is now higher than the national average. Each class's attendance is reported to parents in the weekly newsletter.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils understand the different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying and racist name calling. They report that bullying does not happen often but when it does they trust the adults to sort it out quickly. Pupils know that they can contact the learning mentor through the 'worry box' if they have any worries or concerns, or they can approach her directly in her room or around school.
- Pupils say they feel safe at school. Some of the older pupils help keep the school site safe by taking part in 'health and safety' walks with governors to help spot any areas that might need changing.
- Record keeping is effective. For example, the learning mentor has a very good overview of any incidents of over-boisterous or poor behaviour which might occur at lunchtime and follows these up carefully where necessary.

The quality of teaching is good

- Decisive action taken by school leaders has secured ongoing improvements in the quality of teaching and some teaching, particularly in the Nursery and Reception classes, is outstanding.
- The teaching of reading and mathematics is especially strong in all year groups and pupils make excellent progress. This is because teachers make sure that work provides the right levels of challenge and pupils know what they have to do to improve. In a Year 5 lesson pupils were attempting to crack the code on a teacher's suitcase. They showed great perseverance, as they applied their mathematical knowledge to the task. The classteacher intervened at appropriate times to move learning on. Pupils were encouraged to recall, think and reason, with great success.
- Interesting lessons are planned which capture pupils' imagination. Many opportunities are provided for pupils to work in groups, where they plan, complete and evaluate their work together. For example, Year 6 pupils were writing paragraphs that portrayed feelings of suspense. They enjoyed developing their vocabulary and experimenting with different sentence structures to achieve the desired effect.
- Marking of work and feedback to pupils have improved since the last inspection. Where this is most effective it is made clear to pupils what they need to do to improve their work. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to develop the basic skills of writing when pupils write in other subjects and pupils do not always have time to make corrections or improve their work using the advice given.
- Sometimes teachers do not make it clear to the most able pupils how they can deepen and consolidate their learning in writing and, on occasion, teachers do not demand enough written work from pupils. This can sometimes slow progress.
- Teaching assistants work closely with teachers to provide a good range of challenge and support for pupils who are disadvantaged or disabled and those who have special educational needs. As result of this effective support, pupils progress well and as the school's data show, they are successfully closing the gaps on their classmates.
- Homework is used well. It is set regularly and parents are kept informed about what needs to be done. A homework club is available for pupils who wish to complete this work in school.

The achievement of pupils is good

- In recent years there have been ongoing improvements in all subjects. Almost all pupils make the progress of them in all subjects by the end of Key Stage 2 and an above average proportion do better than this in reading and mathematics. As a result standards in reading and mathematics at the end of Year 6 are now above average.
- The gains in writing are not yet as consistent. In 2014, attainment in the grammar, punctuation and spelling test at the end of Key Stage 2 improved to above average. However, standards in writing remained broadly average and fewer pupils reached the higher levels compared to those doing so in reading and mathematics.
- Progress in Key Stage 1 is good and improving. Although standards showed a slight dip in 2014 from the above average attainment of the previous year, they indicated the year group made good progress from their starting points.
- School data and inspection evidence show that almost all pupils in the school are currently working at the level expected for their age in all subjects. An above average proportion are doing better than this in reading and mathematics but not as many do so in writing.
- The most able pupils do extremely well in reading and mathematics but fewer do so in writing. Although progress is improving and more pupils in the current year are reaching the higher levels across the school, standards in writing for the most able pupils are still not as high as they are in reading and mathematics.
- The achievement of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is at least good and is sometimes better given the starting points and differing abilities of pupils. This is because pupils' needs are identified quickly and very good levels of support are provided swiftly.
- The overall attainment in 2014 of the small number of disadvantaged pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 was similar to that of pupils nationally who are not eligible for the pupil premium. The attainment of disadvantaged pupils was around two terms behind other pupils in the school. However, all of these pupils made at least good and sometimes better progress from their starting points when they joined the school.
- Reading is a strength of the school. Pupils read regularly in school and at home and many display a real passion for reading. Early reading skills are taught well in the early years, with a high proportion of pupils meeting the standard set in the Year 1 check of reading. This excellent start is built on well in the older classes and pupils become confident, fluent readers by the end of Year 6.

The early years provision is outstanding

- Most children enter the early years with skills and knowledge below those typical for their age. Progress is rapid so that by the end of the Reception year the large majority of children have reached good levels of development for their age and, as a result, they are well placed to start work in Year 1. Disabled children and those with special educational needs and the most able make as much progress as other children because their individual needs are identified quickly.
- The quality of teaching in the early years is outstanding. Children thrive in this well-organised, calm and purposeful setting. They settle quickly and become confident, independent learners. Children develop very positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour is outstanding.
- As a result of accurate checks on how well children are doing, teachers and support staff know all children extremely well. Teachers plan sessions carefully and offer a range of exciting and imaginative activities which engage children's interests well. All staff focus carefully on developing children's early literacy and numeracy skills and as a result progress is rapid in these areas too.
- Leadership and management of the early years are outstanding. The co-headteacher who leads the early years has a wealth of knowledge, skills and expertise. She sets the highest expectations for the standards of provision and children's achievement and is a positive role model for everyone in the setting. The curriculum is very well planned to meet children's needs and promotes spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very effectively. Staff are vigilant and ensure the safety and well-being of children.
- Excellent partnerships with parents have been developed. The 'open door' arrangement at the start of each school day is much appreciated by both staff and parents. It provides time for all to share any relevant information or concerns about the children. Parents are highly positive about the teaching and care their children receive.

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	106486
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	448319

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	235
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sophie Gardiner
Co -Headteachers	Lyn Baker and Beverley Grimes
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2010
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