

Lowton Church of England High School

Newton Road, Lowton, Wigan, WA3 1DU

Inspection dates

21–22 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students are not making enough progress and are not attaining as well as they should in mathematics. This is because teaching in mathematics is not consistently good and improvements in the teaching of mathematics have been too slow.
- The work which is given to students in mathematics is sometimes too easy for some and too hard for others. A few students are unable to make simple calculations.
- Students' work in mathematics is not marked sufficiently regularly. As a result, students do not always know what they have done well and how to improve their work. Students do not always respond to teachers' advice and make corrections.
- There is a gap between the attainment of disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students, both within the school and nationally, especially in mathematics.
- Expectations of disadvantaged students, particularly those who are most able, are sometimes not high enough and they are not always taught well. Regular checks that are made on their progress are not used consistently to improve the teaching they receive.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders and governors have acted decisively to secure many improvements since the previous inspection.
- This has resulted in good teaching and achievement in a wide range of subjects, including English and science.
- All senior and almost all middle leaders are driving improvements in their subjects and areas of responsibility. This is ensuring consistently good teaching and achievement in most subjects.
- Students behave well in lessons and around the school. They are keen to learn and take a pride in their work and in their appearance.
- Students are safe in school and say that they feel safe. Attendance has improved rapidly and is now broadly average.
- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well and prepares them for the next stage in their lives.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 28 lessons. They observed other activities for shorter periods of time. Six lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at work in students' books.
- The inspectors met with groups of staff and with three groups of students. They spoke to other students informally at different times of the school day.
- They also met with two representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors took into account 82 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- The inspectors observed the school's work. They looked at information about students' progress, documents relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding, the school's checks on the quality of teaching, its analysis of how well it is doing and its plans for further improvement.

Inspection team

Liz Godman, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Christine Veitch	Additional Inspector
Janet Pruchniewicz	Additional Inspector
Stephen Wall	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than most secondary schools.
- In 2014, the school met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in by the end of Year 11.
- The proportion of students who are disadvantaged is broadly average in comparison to other schools. These are students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority who are supported by pupil premium funding.
- Most students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is broadly similar to that found in most other schools.
- A small number of students attend work-related courses for one day a week, at Wigan and Leigh College, Butts Bridge Skills Centre and Fix It.
- A new headteacher joined the school in September 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and increase the rate of students' progress in mathematics by:
 - making sure that the teaching of mathematics is consistently good or better and is ensuring students' good progress from Year 7 onwards
 - taking rigorous action to eliminate weaker teaching in mathematics
 - making more effective use of the expertise of staff in the school, particularly in mathematics, to drive improvement at a faster rate in the teaching of mathematics
 - providing students with work in mathematics which is neither too hard nor too easy and which tackles the weak skills of a few students in making simple calculations
 - ensuring that students' work in mathematics is marked regularly, so that students know how well they are doing and how to improve their work, and by making sure that students respond to marking by making corrections to their work.
- Take further steps to raise the attainment and to increase the rate of progress of disadvantaged students, particularly in mathematics, so that these students do as well as others both within the school and nationally by:
 - raising expectations as to what these students, particularly the most able, can achieve
 - ensuring disadvantaged students are taught consistently well in all classes and lessons
 - using the regular checks on disadvantaged students' progress in order to adjust teaching accordingly.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The high expectations and effective actions of senior leaders and governors have secured improvement in the school's effectiveness since the last inspection. This has been accelerated further since September 2014 when the new headteacher joined the school.
- As a result, teaching and achievement in most subjects, including English and science, have improved and are now good. However, teaching and students' achievement in mathematics still require improvement and weaker teaching in mathematics has not been eliminated.
- Leaders' checks on the school's work are accurate and are used well to plan actions to secure further improvement.
- The performance of staff is managed effectively and is supported by a programme of training matched to the identified needs of individuals and of the whole staff.
- The local authority has an accurate view of the school's work and has played a key role in supporting developments, for example in English. The local authority has also brokered some support in mathematics, but acknowledges that this has not yet secured the necessary improvements.
- The effectiveness of almost all middle leaders is good. Checks made by middle leaders are accurate and are used well to improve teaching and students' progress in their faculties. There is expertise within the school in the teaching of mathematics, but this has not been used widely enough to ensure that students are taught well and have consistently good skills in the subject.
- Students' skills in reading, writing and communication are developed well because of the emphasis placed on these skills by leaders and teachers in the different subjects.
- Senior leaders, governors and staff have a good knowledge of the attainment and progress of disadvantaged students. This information and the pupil premium funding are used to provide additional activities. These are narrowing the gaps in attainment and progress between these students and others in both English and mathematics.
- However, the gap is not closing fast enough in mathematics. This is because a few staff do not have sufficiently high expectations as to what these students, particularly the most able, can achieve and do not ensure that disadvantaged students are taught consistently well on a day-to-day basis in all classes by adjusting the lessons and work to accelerate their progress.
- The school's courses and activities meet students' academic and personal needs. Helpful careers advice and guidance helps students to prepare for the future. In 2014, all students who left Year 11 went on to further education, training or employment.
- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Discussions around different 'Big Questions' give students opportunities to think about current moral and social issues. This broadens their understanding of different cultures in modern Britain and more widely. They show a deep understanding of different viewpoints and are able to explain these clearly. This exemplifies the school's good work in challenging discrimination and fostering good relations.
- However, the school's work on promoting equality of opportunity is not yet as good as it could be, because the achievement of some disadvantaged students still requires improvement and too many students are underachieving in mathematics.
- The school works well with parents and ensures they are well informed about their child's progress. Communication with parents before and at the start of Year 7 is particularly effective in easing new students' transition into the school.
- The arrangements for safeguarding students meet current requirements. Up-to-date training for staff helps to ensure the school's arrangements are effective. The school makes close checks on the progress, attendance and behaviour of students who attend courses away from the school site.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the school's governing body have an accurate view of the school's work and an understanding of data related to the school's performance. Governors visit the school regularly and are linked with different faculties which help them to gain a first-hand view of the school's work. Their actions to date have helped to secure improvements in teaching and achievement since the previous inspection. They know what further improvements are required in relation to mathematics and in the use of the pupil premium in order to further raise the achievement of disadvantaged students. Their track record of bringing about improvements to date in other areas of the school's work and in ensuring that only good teaching is rewarded means that they are well placed to achieve this.

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

- The behaviour of students is good. Students behave consistently well in lessons, in assemblies and around the school.
- The overwhelming majority of students are very eager to learn and are highly attentive in lessons. They are polite and respectful to staff, visitors and to one another.
- The vast majority of students take pride in their work and keep their books and equipment in good condition. Students are punctual to lessons and settle very quickly, expecting to work from the outset.
- Routines and expectations of students' behaviour are clearly established through the 'LEARN' code and this is proving very successful in establishing and maintaining the good attitudes to learning of all students, including those with particular behavioural needs.
- Students take pride in their appearance and follow the school's uniform code closely. This includes their response to expectations for wearing the correct kit for physical education lessons.
- Students move around the school sensibly and calmly. This contributes to ensuring that students feel safe in all areas of the school, including outside between the different blocks.
- Students' attendance has improved since the previous inspection and in 2013/14 was broadly in line with the national average. This is being maintained this school year.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students' safe and secure is good.
- Students say that bullying is very rare. They know the different forms that bullying may take and know who to go to for help should they need it.
- Students show a good understanding of how to stay safe, for example, when using the internet and social networking sites. They are also well informed about road safety and about drugs education because the school provides them with memorable sessions led by external personnel.
- The school's arrangements to keep students safe are effective and managed well, both on and away from the school site. Students who spoke with inspectors say that they feel very safe. Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire agree.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because, although it is better than at the previous inspection and is securing students' consistently good progress in English and science, it is not yet ensuring good progress in mathematics.
- The school makes regular and accurate checks on how well students are doing and on the progress they are making. The vast majority of staff take close account of the information available when they plan and provide work for their classes.
- However, this is not consistent in mathematics. There are occasions when students are given work which is too hard for some and too easy for others. Staff have started to identify gaps in students' mathematical knowledge and skills but a few students continue to have weak skills in making simple calculations, for example, because they cannot recall multiplication facts.
- In most subjects, students' work is marked regularly and accurately so that students know how well they are doing and how to improve their work. An exception to this is in mathematics where some work is not marked or students are not given clear guidance on how to improve their work.
- Similarly, in most subjects students are given time to make corrections or to improve their work and they do so. However, in mathematics, even where guidance is given, students do not always make the corrections and checks are not made to ensure they have done so.
- Staff know who the disadvantaged students are and the school has a number of effective strategies to raise their attainment, which include additional teaching, individually and in small groups. This has started to close the gaps in attainment between these students and others, but has been more successful in English than in mathematics.
- Some disadvantaged students do not receive regularly good teaching, particularly in mathematics and for those who are the most able. Not all staff have sufficiently high expectations of them or use the information they have to adjust teaching and activities accordingly.
- The school has a clear and consistent approach to homework. In addition, the school's website contains

useful links to homework and revision sites. This supports teaching and students' learning and a substantial majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire agree that their children receive suitable homework.

- The teaching of reading and writing is good and there is a good focus on literacy skills and technical vocabulary in the different subjects. This is helping to secure students' good progress. There are also positive examples of opportunities for students to use their mathematical skills in other subjects, for example, science.
- The teaching of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is generally good. For example, some of these students are taught in smaller classes in Years 10 and 11 for science or mathematics. They are following the same GCSE courses as other students, but the work is carefully tailored to their needs, thus building their confidence and increasing the rate of their progress.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because in mathematics the proportions of students who make expected or better progress and the attainment of students are lower than seen nationally.
- At the previous inspection this was also true for English, but students' progress in English has improved rapidly and is now good. Attainment and progress are also good in science, humanities subjects and modern languages. The school's strengths in physical education have been maintained.
- The majority of students join the school with skills that are broadly average in English and mathematics.
- However, a significant minority of older students have made less-than-expected progress in mathematics during their time at the school. Consequently, in 2014, the proportion of students at the end of Year 11 who gained five GCSE at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was below average.
- The school's predicted results for 2015 indicate that attainment at GCSE will improve in both English and mathematics, but with lower attainment in mathematics than in English.
- This picture of improved attainment and progress was also confirmed during the inspection by the scrutiny of work in students' books in the different subjects, but was less evident in mathematics books in all year groups.
- Students are not entered for GCSE examinations before the end of Year 11, except occasionally for a very small number of students where there are compelling reasons for doing so. As a result, students have time to develop their skills before taking the examinations.
- The school offers a very small number of students the opportunity one day each week to follow work-related qualifications at places away from the school site, mainly at Wigan and Leigh College. This enables these students to develop work-related skills and to achieve success.
- Students make a good start to their secondary education when they join Year 7. Those who find reading, writing and mathematics difficult and who did not reach the expected levels at the end of Year 6 receive effective help through the school's good use of the Year 7 catch-up funding.
- Many most able students achieve as well as they should in the majority of subjects and gained the highest grades of A* or A in GCSE English in 2014. However, a smaller proportion gained these grades in mathematics. This is particularly true of those who are most able and also disadvantaged.
- In 2014, the gap in attainment between disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students was the equivalent of more than one GCSE grade in English and mathematics compared to other students in the school and one grade in English but nearly two grades in mathematics compared to others nationally. Information kept by the school shows further improvement in the attainment and progress of disadvantaged students currently in the school, but that this is more marked in English than in mathematics.
- The progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is good. This is because the staff who teach them provide work which meets their needs and because they receive sensitive and personalised support which helps them to overcome their difficulties and to become more confident.

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	137783
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	442421

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	621
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jennifer Farley
Headteacher	Julian Pollard
Date of previous school inspection	27 February 2013
Telephone number	01942 767040
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