

Lowton Church of England High School

Newton Road, Lowton, Warrington, Cheshire WA3 1DU

Inspection dates

13–14 December 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Teaching is not yet consistently good or better. More rigorous approaches and better checks on its quality have led to improvement. The work teachers plan for pupils is not always challenging enough to enable all groups of pupils to make rapid progress. This is especially true in key stage 3.
- Pupils do not make enough progress in mathematics. Standards in mathematics are rising, particularly in key stage 4, but they are not yet in line with those in English.
- Teachers are getting used to the new assessment policy, although it is not yet being used consistently. As a result, pupils are not always absolutely clear where they are in their learning or how to improve their work.
- Leaders' use of the Year 7 catch-up funding is not fully effective. Consequently, pupils who join the school with low attainment do not make rapid enough progress.
- Strategies to improve standards for disadvantaged pupils are not yet fully in place. Differences between the progress of the low and middle ability disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally, although reducing, remain.

The school has the following strengths

- The school knows its strengths and weaknesses well. The headteacher and governing body have identified areas for improvement carefully and devised appropriate initiatives to tackle them. The headteacher's leadership is fully supported by staff.
- Pupils are well looked after. They have a good awareness of how to protect themselves against potential danger. Attendance is improving for all groups of pupils.
- Governance checks on the school's arrangements have ensured that all safeguarding requirements are met and pupils are kept safe.
- Pupils behave well. The school's Christian ethos supports good relationships and mutual respect. Varied opportunities are provided for pupils to learn about British values.
- Most-able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Fully implement the new assessment scheme so that it is consistently understood and used by all teachers to evaluate pupils' work, identify and remedy underachievement and provide information for all pupils on how to improve their work.
- Enable all groups of pupils to make rapid progress, especially in key stage 3, by making sure that:
 - teachers carefully plan work at the right level of challenge for all pupils
 - staff implement policies consistently in all year groups and across all subjects.
- Make sure that the improvements started in mathematics and the strategy for low and middle ability disadvantaged pupils are consistently used by all teachers in all year groups.
- Make better use of the Year 7 catch-up funding so that targeted pupils make faster progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher provides dynamic leadership that is well focused on school improvement. He is very aware of the school's strengths and areas for development. He defines his mission as a journey of continued improvement from a statistically low starting point. As a result, he and other senior leaders have implemented a number of strategies and initiatives to tackle the areas that need improvement. He has reorganised the responsibilities of senior leaders and revised the process for managing the performance of staff. New appointments, including the leaders responsible for mathematics and for the school's use of pupil premium funding, have made a positive impact.
- Leaders have introduced new, school-wide approaches to teaching. Checks on the quality of teaching are now more rigorous. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving, most notably in key stage 4. Middle leaders support the headteacher's vision for improvement, especially the development of consistently high-quality teaching. They are fully involved in school improvement, including through their checks on the quality of teaching and the evaluation of staff performance in their areas of responsibility. They particularly value the range of development opportunities provided for them to improve their own performance and to work together.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, with a strong focus on academic subjects. Leaders are taking action to increase the range of subjects offered to more precisely meet the needs of all pupils. They are currently devising a wide range of alternative subject choices.
- Pupils have the opportunity to understand how to keep themselves safe through assemblies and the 'big questions' they consider in registration time. Topics include internet safety and alcohol abuse; pupils debate such issues with interest.
- Additional activities enable pupils to extend their learning. They have opportunities to engage in a range of sports that support healthy living. Membership of the choir and other clubs contributes to their cultural development.
- School leaders commissioned an independent review of the use of pupil premium funding after the last inspection. A new coordinator was established as part of a review of management roles in the school and a revised strategy was introduced. The strategy is the product of the work of both the current and previous post holders. It enables leaders to rigorously check on the effectiveness of the use of the funding, including improving attendance. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has increased, leading to improvements in their achievement, especially for the most able disadvantaged pupils. Some differences remain between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and their peers nationally.
- Pupils have a variety of opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding including British values. These opportunities are made available through the curriculum, assemblies and the registration programme. Examples include topics such as democracy, making good use of the recent presidential election in the United States, and British heritage, linking this to a Remembrance service for those

who served their country in the armed forces. The school's ethos encourages tolerance and an understanding of different faiths and groups in Britain. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

- Leaders' processes for evaluating the performance of staff are robust. The school's performance management system has been revised to make sure that common staff targets are linked directly to school priorities. The policy is implemented with rigour and consistency. Staff value the opportunities they have to develop their practice and further their careers.
- Ensuring equality of opportunity for all is central to the school's ethos and work. This approach is supported by a comprehensive equalities policy and a range of activities within the curriculum. Pupils speak articulately about tolerance.
- The school has thorough systems to engage parents. Consultation evenings are well attended and reports contain comprehensive information to help parents understand their children's progress. New pupils and their parents are supported by home visits and a transition evening, which have received positive feedback.
- Leaders had difficulties in securing a stable mathematics department for some time. They successfully recruited a subject leader for mathematics who took up post in September 2015. The new leader has brought a renewed vision for the subject and a stronger focus on checking the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved, especially in key stage 4 where much teaching is now effective.
- The school receives effective support from the local authority consisting of termly reviews which help evaluate pupils' attainment and progress, teachers' assessment and leaders' self-evaluation.
- A new assessment policy has been introduced and has been welcomed by subject leaders. It is more rigorous and involves subject leaders in closer monitoring of its implementation. Leaders have identified, as a priority, the use of catch-up funding to help underperforming pupils in Year 7. Checks on these pupils' progress in both literacy and numeracy are not clear and the way leaders evaluate the impact of the use of this funding is not yet robust enough.

Governance of the school

- Governors promote the school's Christian ethos effectively and value the culture of tolerance and respect it produces. They understand the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They recognise the improvements in attendance for specific groups of pupils and are aware of the continued need to improve standards in mathematics and for disadvantaged pupils. They provide vigorous challenge and useful support to senior leaders.
- The governing body is closely involved in checking that the management of staff performance is secure. Governors understand the process well and its link to pupils' progress, and they monitor its use carefully. Governors know how the school measures pupils' attainment and progress using the new assessment policy and are aware that its full implementation is a school priority.
- Governors understand how pupil premium funding is used and check on its effectiveness. They are less clear about the impact of the Year 7 catch-up funding on

the literacy and numeracy skills of underachieving pupils. They are also aware of recent initiatives to secure improvement in the use of both areas of funding and are monitoring their execution carefully.

- Governors ensure that safeguarding is comprehensive and effective. They are diligent in their ongoing checks on the school's arrangements and have received relevant training to support them.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Processes for the recruitment of staff are rigorous and fully meet statutory requirements. Safeguarding documentation is complete and effective use is made of external agencies when appropriate.
- The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. All policies are in place, accessible and reviewed at appropriate intervals. Staff and governors receive relevant training in areas such as child protection, extremism and radicalisation. Staff are fully aware of how to report concerns and the headteacher is a member of the local safeguarding board. The school site is very secure.
- Pupils feel very safe. They are taught to identify potential dangers and how to avoid them. Staff know the pupils well and are actively follow up any potential issues. Parents overwhelmingly believe the school keeps their children safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching varies too much throughout the school and does not yet enable pupils to make consistently good or better progress. Teaching is generally less effective in key stage 3 than in key stage 4. Work in lessons is not sufficiently tailored to accommodate the full range of pupils' abilities. A new strategy to provide greater consistency has been implemented. It is showing a positive impact on the quality of teaching and on the pace of learning, but it is too early to see its full impact on pupils' progress.
- The assessment system now in use is too new to provide teachers with all the information they need to support their planning and is not yet consistently used. Pupils are not always clear about how well they are doing and they are unsure of their targets. Teachers' feedback to pupils on to how to improve their work is not consistently effective.
- Teachers use questioning well. For example, in design and technology the teacher directed very precise questions of increasing depth to make sure pupils in Year 7 were able to understand how to use a coping saw.
- Pupils are encouraged to express and discuss their ideas. In religious education, for example, they considered ways in which alcohol could be used responsibly. This led to a lively discussion where all pupils shared their views and evaluated their opinions.
- Teachers work hard to address misconceptions that pupils might have. This was exemplified when Year 10 pupils were comparing writers' techniques in English, effectively supported by the teacher carefully assessing pupils' ideas and extending

their learning by asking probing questions.

- Homework is set regularly and is a consistent feature of teaching across the school. Parents appreciate the opportunity they have to monitor their children's homework.
- Consultation evenings and annual reports enable parents to review their children's progress. The majority of parents responding to the online survey stated that they received valuable information. They also viewed the school's revision processes favourably.
- Opportunities for staff to improve their practice are extensive and in line with headteacher's strategies for improvement. Teachers attend network meetings in their subjects and receive direct support from other schools. The popular weekly development opportunities for staff help them to learn from each other, share good practice and develop greater consistency in assessing pupils' work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are kept very safe at school, supported by the vigorous safeguarding culture. They are taught how to avoid potential dangers when using social media and of the risks associated with alcohol abuse. Pupils can report any concerns confidentially. Parents believe the school keeps their children safe.
- The school's popular sporting provision and sponsored walks for charity enhance pupils' healthy lifestyles.
- Pupils are happy at school and proud of what they achieve. They feel the school is 'kind' and it 'treats everyone equally'. Mutual respect and tolerance are well developed and underpinned by the school's ethos and values. One pupil echoed the views of others when he said that, 'It feels like we are part of a family.' Discrimination of any sort is not tolerated by staff or pupils. One pupil stated that having a different sexual orientation is 'no big deal'. Another said, 'Everyone is accepted, no matter what you are.'
- Pupils are able to develop leadership skills through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, the school council and by providing support and guidance to each other.
- Pupils were also involved in developing the school's anti-bullying policy. They understand what bullying is and the forms it may take, including racist, homophobic and cyber bullying. Pupils say that bullying is rare, and the school's records confirm this view. Pupils are aware of where to get help should an incident occur and are confident it will be dealt with effectively.
- Careers information and guidance are well developed within the curriculum and supported by links with local employers and further education institutions. A prominent focus of the guidance is the avoidance of stereotyping in employment, centred on encouraging girls to explore careers in engineering and construction. Pupils are given the opportunity to explore the full range of careers options, including apprenticeships. The success of the school's provision is reflected in the high and rising percentages of pupils who take up a range of employment or educational options. Pupils are well

prepared for their next stage in employment and education. The school's careers provision is well regarded among parents.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well at social times and when moving around the school. They are calm, respectful and friendly. They are quickly challenged by staff on the rare occasions when their behaviour is inappropriate and respond well.
- Pupils display positive attitudes to learning. They come to lessons prepared to learn, take pride in their work and are keen to explain it. Lack of interesting work can lead to some pupils becoming less engaged. This trait is more prevalent in key stage 3 than in key stage 4.
- Pupils' enjoyment of school is seen in their steadily improving attendance. Currently, overall attendance is above average. Attendance for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is also improving. Raising attendance is a high priority for the school. Leaders use a wide range of strategies to tackle it. These include 'attendance days', daily absence checks, phone calls home and attendance reviews. The school is also establishing an external support system to replace that discontinued by the local authority.
- No pupils have been permanently excluded from the school in recent years. There has been a considerable reduction in the proportion of pupils who have been temporarily excluded because of poor behaviour. This reduction has been particularly notable for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school monitors the behaviour, attendance and learning of pupils taught off-site to ensure their safety and secure progress.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress in mathematics is not strong enough. From their starting points, pupils make slower progress in mathematics than in English. Current information provided by the school indicates that there is some improvement in progress in mathematics, particularly in key stage 4, but it remains below other subject areas in key stage 3.
- The school's information shows that the progress made by the current disadvantaged pupils, including those with lower starting points, has improved in comparison with the progress made by pupils who left the school in 2016. This indicates that the new system for deciding how pupil premium funding is spent is starting to have some impact. However, differences in progress still remain. The school has identified the need to improve the progress of middle-ability pupils.
- The most able pupils and the most able disadvantaged pupils make faster progress from their starting points than other pupils. These pupils are well motivated and respond well when they are set challenging work. The progress of pupils with low starting points, including disadvantaged pupils and girls, has been slower than for other pupils but has recently improved.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported. Their

needs are carefully assessed and effective support is provided. The school's information shows that these pupils are now making faster overall but this varies between subjects, with stronger progress in English than in mathematics.

- Pupils' achievement in 2016 was high in geography, religious education, drama, physical education and photography. However, pupils did less well in resistant materials and physics.
- The school's leaders are focusing staff's attention on the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy across all subjects. The teaching and assessment of numeracy have been extended from mathematics into science and a whole-school audit has been undertaken.
- Pupils enjoy reading. The most and least able readers read with confidence and fluency in line with their abilities. Reading books are at the right level of challenge for pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	137783
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10024099

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 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	573
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rosemary Johnston
Headteacher	Julian Pollard
Telephone number	01942 767040
Website	www.lowtonhs.wigan.sch.uk
Email address	enquiries@lowtonhs.wigan.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	21–22 January 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is a smaller-than-average secondary school. Its size is due to increase in September 2017.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school has links with Oakfield Special School to provide additional support for some pupils. Other than this, it does not use any alternative provision.

- In 2015, the school met the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for progress and attainment.
- The headteacher took up his post just before the last inspection.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of lessons. They undertook four joint observations with senior leaders. A number of shorter visits to lessons also took place. Pupils' work in books was looked at both in lessons and in a session with school staff. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their work.
- Inspectors observed the start and end of school, break and lunchtimes, an assembly and registration sessions. Inspectors analysed 37 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, 33 parental responses on free text and 32 responses to a staff questionnaire.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils, staff, parents, governors and a representative of the local authority.
- A range of school documentation was scrutinised including the school's development plan and its self-evaluation. Inspectors also considered the school's information about pupils' attainment and progress, attendance and behaviour.
- Additional documentation also examined by inspectors related to safeguarding, risk assessments, minutes of meetings of the governing body, and the performance of staff in relation to their targets. A tour of the school was also undertaken to evaluate site security.

Inspection team

Mike Merva, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Emma Gregory	Ofsted Inspector
Deborah Bailey	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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