

Little Lever School

Church Street, Little Lever, Bolton, Greater Manchester BL3 1BT

Inspection dates

27–28 November 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The actions of leaders, including trustees and the local governing body, have not resulted in enough improvement to the quality of teaching or the academic standards that pupils achieve.
- Across a range of subjects, including English, pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Leaders' monitoring of teaching did not identify the weaknesses, particularly in English, which resulted in continuing underachievement in the academic year 2017/18.
- In too many subjects, teachers' and leaders' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low.
- Too much teaching is insufficiently focused on enabling pupils to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding. This is particularly true in relation to the most able pupils and boys.
- Teaching does not take enough account of the barriers to learning which disadvantaged pupils face.
- The spending of the pupil premium funding is not effective. Disadvantaged pupils still underachieve considerably when compared with non-disadvantaged pupils in school and across the country.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have been very successful in improving behaviour and reducing the number of exclusions. Pupils now conduct themselves well and have good attitudes to learning.
- Recent changes have developed a curriculum which matches pupils' capabilities and aspirations.
- Improvements in subject leadership have had a positive impact on standards and the quality of teaching in some subjects, including mathematics and science.
- The school works well with pupils and their families to achieve good and improving attendance and punctuality.
- Staff are highly effective in their work with vulnerable pupils, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those at risk of exclusion.
- Teachers ensure that pupils understand and respect diversity, including in race, culture and sexual orientation.
- Leaders and staff keep pupils safe in school and teach them how to keep themselves safe.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the vision of leaders and those responsible for governance results in high expectations of pupils' progress
 - making sure that the spending of the pupil premium funding is more effective in raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils
 - focusing the monitoring of teaching more clearly on its impact on the standards that pupils achieve.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should achieve, especially in English
 - using assessment information more effectively to devise programmes of work and tasks which match more closely to pupils' prior attainment and capabilities, especially those of the most able
 - developing a wider range of teaching strategies to improve the progress of boys.
- Raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils by:
 - linking the barriers to learning which these pupils face more clearly with activities and spending
 - ensuring that teachers develop more effective classroom strategies to support the progress of this group.

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

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- In too many subjects, the actions that leaders, including trustees, have taken to improve the quality of teaching and middle leadership have not made enough difference to pupils' academic progress.
- The vision of leaders, including trustees, has not resulted in consistently high expectations of pupils' progress.
- The headteacher and all leaders in the school have a good knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses. However, monitoring has not been sufficiently focused on the impact of teaching and leadership on pupils' achievement.
- Despite a range of external support, monitoring did not identify the weaknesses in teaching which led to continued underperformance in 2018. This was particularly true of English.
- To increase their ability to monitor effectively, leaders have recently significantly increased support from external subject specialists. They now receive more detailed and regular information on the extent to which programmes of work match examination requirements and pupils' prior attainment and capabilities.
- Leaders have begun to use a wider range of activities to monitor teaching. They have given subject leaders time and training to allow them to take more responsibility for checking on teaching in their subject areas. As these developments are quite recent, it is too early to see their impact in most subjects.
- Since September 2017, eight new subject leaders took up their post, including in English, mathematics and science. In some subjects, including mathematics and science, new leadership has improved teaching and pupils' attainment. In others, including English, the impact of new leadership is not sufficiently evident.
- Wider opportunities for training and for stronger teachers to coach weaker ones are beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching.
- Leaders do not use their knowledge of the barriers to learning that disadvantaged pupils face well enough to plan spending and actions. The use of the pupil premium funding has not resulted in significant improvement in the achievement of this group.
- Funding for pupils in Year 7 who need to catch up in literacy and numeracy is used well. The majority have improved their skills and are on the way to catching up with their peers.
- The leadership of pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare is very strong. Actions have resulted in marked improvement in pupils' behaviour and in strong and improving attendance.
- Support for pupils with SEND is well organised to promote their well-being and academic progress. They enjoy school and reach their full potential in most subjects.
- Leaders have made significant changes to the curriculum. There is a greater choice of qualifications than was previously the case. Inspectors' conversations with pupils indicated that they feel that the courses they follow prepare them well for work or the

next stage in their education.

- Tolerance and respect for difference are woven into schemes of work and reinforced in assembly and form time. In conversations with inspectors, pupils demonstrated a very mature and respectful attitude towards cultures and lifestyles which differ from their own.
- During the inspection, pupils, especially in key stage 3, showed very little knowledge of world religions and had little concept of democracy.
- Across the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities, teachers give pupils good opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The headteacher, trustees and the local governing body have welcomed external support and review. Often this support has enhanced the school's self-evaluation. However, some reviews did not help leaders to identify the weaknesses which have led to pupils' current and past underachievement.

Governance of the school

- Until recently, trustees and governors had not held leaders to account effectively for the standard of education in the school.
- Previously, those responsible for governance had not acted effectively to improve the quality of education in the school.
- Governance has recently been restructured. Lines of accountability are now very clear. Trustees and members of the local governing body use a wide range of relevant knowledge, skills and experience to hold senior leaders to account.
- After the publication of the examination results in 2018, trustees and governors asked senior leaders very challenging questions about how the quality of teaching had been monitored and why this had not resulted in better achievement across a wider range of subjects. They continue to check thoroughly the impact of their actions and those of senior leaders.
- Better monitoring procedures now ensure that trustees and governors act more swiftly in response to more detailed and accurate information about the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- Governors have strengthened performance management procedures. Their impact is currently variable across subjects but is very clear in some subjects, including science and mathematics.
- Trustees and governors fulfil all statutory responsibilities and fully understand their role in safeguarding pupils and staff.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All staff understand their role in safeguarding the pupils in their care.
- The school works closely with parents and carers and external agencies to ensure that practices and procedures keep pupils safe.

- Staff respond swiftly to support pupils and their families and record information efficiently.
- Staff have undertaken recent and regular training in all relevant aspects of keeping children safe. They know which procedures to follow if they have concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- In some subjects, including English, despite some improvement, too much teaching remains ineffective in ensuring that pupils make enough progress to reach their full potential.
- On the other hand, more sustained and substantial improvements in teaching are evident in pupils' progress in some subjects, including mathematics and science.
- The assessment of pupils' work is now more accurate as a result of teachers and subject leaders from this school, and other schools, working together to compare the marks they award.
- Despite more accurate assessment, leaders' and teachers' expectations of attainment are too low given what pupils achieved at the end of Year 6.
- Although teachers have a wide range of accurate assessment information, in some subjects too many of the tasks set do not take enough account of pupils' prior attainment and capabilities. This contributes to pupils, particularly the most able, undertaking tasks which do not develop their knowledge, skills or understanding.
- Some changes, such as the introduction of mastery in mathematics, have resulted in pupils developing a depth of knowledge and level of skill which have improved their attainment.
- Teachers manage pupils' behaviour in classrooms very well. They create a very positive atmosphere, using praise, humour and encouragement. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy learning.
- Teachers organise and use resources effectively. They have established good routines so that lessons are well organised and pupils follow instructions immediately.
- However, when teachers pitch work at the wrong level, some boys become inattentive and attempt to distract others. Teachers deal with this quickly, but pupils told inspectors that this occasional low-level disruption wastes time in lessons.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, which some use well to plan work and frame questions to extend pupils' understanding and clarify misconceptions.
- The teaching of vulnerable pupils and pupils with SEND in the personal-learning base and the nurture rooms is very strong. Strategies to increase pupils' self-esteem and motivation to learn are highly effective and have contributed to the marked decrease in the number of exclusions.
- Staff support pupils with SEND well in class and in small withdrawal groups.
- Teachers of subjects other than English and mathematics are beginning to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills.
- Parents appreciate the comprehensive information that they receive about their

children's progress.

- Teachers set homework regularly. Pupils say that it helps them to remember what they learned in class. They particularly appreciate the new online system for mathematics homework.
- Neither pupils nor staff accept the use of derogatory language. Staff teach pupils to respect difference of every kind.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff ensure that vulnerable pupils and those with SEND are comfortable and happy in school. This contributes to their good attendance and enjoyment of learning.
- Leaders have organised and resourced the pastoral system very well. Parents and pupils speak highly of how staff help them at difficult times in their lives.
- From Year 7 onwards, staff help pupils to develop good attitudes to learning. Pupils' work is generally neat and well organised and they are keen to do well.
- Pupils make full use of the school's well-devised 'life chances' careers information, education and guidance (CIEAG) programme to help them choose subjects which suit their career aspirations and capabilities. Year 11 pupils confidently told inspectors about their post-16 aspirations, and they knew what grades and subjects they need to achieve them.
- Staff and expert visitors make sure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe from physical and emotional harm. The school has taught the pupils very well how to keep themselves safe on the internet and when using mobile technology.
- Pupils told inspectors that bullying is rare but, when it happens, staff deal with it swiftly. They explained how pastoral staff make sure that the perpetrators of bullying understand how their actions have affected their victim.
- The school provides a wide-ranging personal, social and health education programme. Pupils know how to eat healthily and how to avoid the dangers of drugs and alcohol.
- In school, pupils make a 'bucket list' of things they should experience before leaving. Staff organise extra-curricular opportunities, particularly cultural visits and residential visits abroad, which contribute to pupils' social and cultural development.
- Eight pupils attend another school for one afternoon per week. Leaders ensure their safety and well-being by frequently communicating with colleagues in relation to their attendance and welfare.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders have put in place highly effective strategies to improve previous weaknesses in pupils' conduct in lessons and at social times. Pupils conduct themselves well, and the number of exclusions has decreased by more than half.
- Pupils look smart and are mature, polite and courteous.
- Most pupils attend school regularly. Rates of attendance are similar to national averages and continue to improve.
- Staff and pupils said that the headteacher and senior leaders are highly visible around the school and contribute to the very orderly environment.
- Staff, including senior leaders, greet pupils when they arrive at school and challenge any latecomers so that punctuality is good. Pupils arrive at lessons on time and are well equipped for learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- In some subjects, including English, pupils do not reach their full academic potential. Over time, some weak teaching and low expectations on the part of leaders and teachers have contributed to this underachievement.
- Conversely, in some subjects, including mathematics and science, improvements in teaching and leadership have ensured that pupils now make good progress.
- The relatively small number of pupils who study languages continue to make better progress than in most subjects. This is the result of good subject leadership and effective teaching, as well as the benefits of smaller groups which allow teachers to work closely with individuals.
- Boys continue to underachieve overall in relation to girls, although they achieve more than girls in mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not achieve as well as non-disadvantaged pupils in school or across the country. At key stage 3, this difference is diminishing a little more than at key stage 4, but it still remains too great.
- Leaders quickly assess the needs of pupils with SEND so that staff can give them help in time. This contributes to their good progress in relation to where they started at the beginning of Year 7.
- Pupils who arrive in Year 7 with weak literacy and numeracy skills receive extra help. They are well on the way to catching up with their peers.
- The school's 'Drop Everything and Read' time gives pupils the opportunity to read a wide range of texts quietly in school. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy reading for pleasure and inspectors heard them read aloud with confidence and good comprehension skills.
- The proportion of pupils who remain in sustained education, employment or training after leaving the school is broadly in line with the national average. Effective CIEAG

contributes significantly to this.

School details

Unique reference number	142296
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10053441

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	986
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Ms K Carter
Headteacher	Dominic McKeown
Telephone number	01204 333 300
Website	www.little-lever.bolton.sch.uk
Email address	info@little-lever.bolton.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Little Lever School is an average-sized secondary school.
- The number of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is a little higher than average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom English is not their first language is lower than average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is small in comparison with the national figure. The proportion of pupils who have a statement of SEND or an education, health and care plan is also smaller than the national average.
- Eight girls in Year 10 attend a hair and beauty course on one afternoon per week at St

Catherine's Academy.

- The school has received support from St James Teaching Alliance, Blessed Thomas Halford Teaching Alliance and Outward Grange Multi-Academy Trust. It employs a school improvement adviser and an external consultant.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited classrooms to observe teaching and pupils' learning. They carried out some of these lesson observations jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors observed and spoke to pupils during lessons and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors met formally with four groups of pupils and took account of 81 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.
- An inspector heard a range of pupils read.
- Inspectors held discussions with staff, middle and senior leaders. They took account of 31 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.
- Inspectors had discussions with members of the board of trustees and governing body and the school improvement adviser.
- Inspectors took account of a range of documentation, including arrangements for safeguarding. They also considered the school's information about pupils' outcomes and scrutinised pupils' books and assessment information.
- Inspectors considered 52 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents.

Inspection team

Liz Kelly, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Dympna Woods	Ofsted Inspector
Jan Rowney	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Shakos	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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