

Lowerplace Primary School

Kingsway, Rochdale, Lancashire OL16 4UU

Inspection dates

8–9 May 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since his appointment in 2017, the headteacher has raised expectations and initiated an ambitious programme of improvements which is having a positive effect in all areas of the school.
- The new leadership team is successfully driving these improvements after a period of instability and a decline in outcomes. As a result, current pupils are making good progress.
- Governors are knowledgeable and make a good contribution to shaping the strategic direction of the school.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have put in place a rigorous programme of training to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, the quality of teaching is good and standards are now rising.
- Pupils are very proud of their school. They show respect to adults and to each other. Their behaviour is good.
- The work the school does to support pupils' personal development and welfare is excellent. Pupils flourish in this nurturing environment. They enjoy school and find learning interesting.
- Pupils' safety has high priority. Robust systems are in place to keep pupils as safe as possible in school and beyond.
- Provision for children in the early years is outstanding. Strong leadership, purposeful activities and high-quality teaching mean children make rapid progress from the time they enter school.
- The content of pupils' writing is often of a high standard but this quality is not always replicated in their writing in other subjects.
- The majority of current pupils make good progress from their starting points in a range of subjects. This is not rapid enough for all pupils in key stage 2, including for the most able.
- In some year groups, disadvantaged pupils lag behind their peers due to a legacy of weak assessment which did not accurately identify their needs.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has improved. The new coordinator of the provision for pupils with SEND has rapidly got to grips with the challenges of the role. However, she has not yet had time to have sufficient impact on fully improving outcomes for this group.
- Some subjects in the curriculum, such as art and design and modern foreign languages, are not planned or taught in sufficient depth.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement further by making sure that:
 - expectations of pupils' writing are increased across all subjects
 - teaching in key stage 2 consistently matches the needs of pupils and is pitched so that the more able are challenged appropriately.
- Leaders and managers:
 - continue to develop the curriculum to ensure adequate depth and progression across all subjects, especially in modern foreign languages and art and design
 - ensure that disadvantaged pupils continue to make the accelerated progress necessary to enable them to attain as well as other pupils by the end of key stage 2
 - continue to build on the effective strategies in place to improve outcomes for pupils with SEND.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher, well supported by the leadership team, has brought about significant improvements in the school. Together, they have created a culture of high expectations for themselves, staff and pupils. Staff morale is high and all members of the school community rise to these high expectations.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate view of what the school does well and what it needs to do to be even more successful. The school improvement plan is detailed and carefully monitors the effect of planned actions on outcomes for pupils and their learning. Leaders add further rigour to their evaluation when working closely with a network of local schools which moderate their judgements.
- All staff benefit from a wide range of professional development to improve teaching. Coaching, performance management and good-quality training are specifically designed to make sure teachers have the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of pupils in the school.
- Leaders carefully monitor the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress, especially in English and mathematics. Leaders focus meticulously on reviewing individual pupils' progress in meetings with teachers. Leaders set precise targets to address any gaps in learning and plan support so that most pupils catch up quickly.
- Leaders and governors are committed to ensuring that pupils develop a strong set of values which enable them to make a positive contribution to their community. This is reflected in the emphasis on promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Good links with local religious leaders highlights the close connection the school has within the community. Leaders make sure that all are made welcome in Lowerplace Primary School. Diversity is celebrated and differences appreciated. These qualities help pupils to make the most of school and become responsible members of British society.
- The newly appointed coordinator of the provision for pupils with SEND has made a very positive start to her work. Her passion and commitment have resulted in rapid improvements in the provision for pupils with SEND in a short space of time. She has gained a clear view of what needs to be done. Useful structures and foundations have already been put in place, including careful and frequent monitoring of how well pupils are doing. This work is beginning to have an impact on pupils' progress but is still at an early stage.
- Pupils study an appropriate curriculum. In books and on classroom walls, there are plenty of examples of pupils' recent work across a wide range of subjects. The sequence of learning in English, mathematics and science is well organised and ensures that pupils cover everything they need to know before moving to secondary school.
- Leaders have focused on ensuring that pupils have secured the fundamental skills of reading, writing and mathematics. However, some subjects in the broader curriculum are not taught in sufficient depth. Planning in these areas is not yet fully developed.
- Leaders use the pupil premium funding well to provide targeted support for disadvantaged pupils. This has been most effective in supporting pupils' emotional

health and well-being, as well as significantly improving some pupils' behaviour. The positive impact of this support is seen in the improving progress made by current pupils. However, a legacy of weak assessment, which did not accurately identify the support needed, means some older pupils have gaps in their knowledge. Leaders have prioritised this group, acknowledging that further work is required to accelerate progress.

- Leaders have used the primary school physical education (PE) and sports funding well to invest in sports coaching and new equipment which enhance pupils' experiences. Pupils enjoy taking part in competitive tournaments, including football, netball and rugby. They are proud of their success.
- The vast majority of parents and carers are supportive of the school. They are highly appreciative of the good communication and the quality of teaching. For example, some describe it as 'great'.

Governance of the school

- Since the previous inspection, governors have made several important appointments, including that of headteacher, to strengthen the leadership of the school further. They have ensured that leaders have the specialisms and expertise in vital areas to support the growth of the school. Governors share the passion and commitment of leaders in wanting the very best for the pupils of Lowerplace Primary School.
- Governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are increasingly well informed about the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. This is because they are regularly involved in the life of the school. Governors participate in monitoring activities alongside senior leaders, such as meeting with their link subject leaders and making visits to classes. They ask challenging questions about the information they are given and use the advice of the local authority to help validate reports provided by school leaders.
- Governors bring a range of appropriate professional skills and experience which enhance their impact on school improvement. They undertake reviews to identify areas for development within their own work. They stay abreast of changes in education by regularly attending training, including that relating to safeguarding.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- A highly committed team is tenacious in monitoring all aspects of safeguarding for pupils, both in school and beyond. There are strong links with a wide spectrum of agencies and community representatives to ensure that the safety of children remains the highest priority.
- The pastoral team swiftly identifies the support needed for pupils and their families who join school midway through the academic year, including those newly arrived in the country. Frequently, the families have faced trauma and instability. Well-designed support systems help pupils and families to assimilate quickly into life in the community and the school.
- Staff are well trained in line with their responsibilities. They receive frequent updates

from members of the safeguarding team. The result is that the culture within the school is one of vigilance.

- The majority of parents have confidence that staff are successful in nurturing pupils and keeping them safe. The pastoral team works very hard to build trust and good relationships with families. This ensures that concerns are shared and support identified quickly when needed.
- The curriculum and assemblies contribute effectively to pupils' knowledge of how to keep safe. For example, they learn about how to stay safe online and about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. They are well prepared to deal with any potential incidents which might occur.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- School leaders have continually focused on improving teaching, learning and the accuracy of assessment. They have taken action to address any weaker teaching. The headteacher and senior leaders have ensured rapid improvements by providing guidance, training and skilled support to teachers.
- Teaching is effective and teachers and teaching assistants are dedicated, enthusiastic and hardworking. They establish very positive relationships with their pupils, which promote positive attitudes to learning from the moment children join the school.
- Teachers' high expectations of pupils' behaviour ensure that pupils work hard and concentrate well. There are no distractions in lessons, which further supports the good progress pupils make.
- The teaching of reading, including phonics, has been a major focus for staff training. Leaders have implemented a consistent and well-organised approach to the teaching of phonics in the Reception Year and key stage 1. Teaching builds securely and progressively on what pupils have already learned and pupils use their phonics knowledge well when they meet unfamiliar words. Pupils quickly develop confidence in reading.
- Teachers successfully promote an enjoyment of reading with older pupils. Teachers use high-quality texts to enthuse pupils and motivate them to read. Pupils are encouraged to read for pleasure in the cosy environment of 'Grandma's Snug', where they can explore the wide range of books on offer. This dedicated reading space is one of several initiatives that is contributing to pupils' good progress in reading.
- The provision for pupils with SEND is improving rapidly. Teaching assistants work closely with the special educational needs coordinator to support pupils' learning needs within the classroom and in appropriately planned small groups.
- In their English books, pupils write with flair and imagination. Teachers develop pupils' writing skills well in key stage 1 and by the time they reach Year 6 the standard of pupils' work in English is good. However, this same standard is not replicated across the curriculum where expectations of grammar, spelling, punctuation and handwriting are not as high.
- Teachers' secure subject knowledge contributes well to the progress pupils make in mathematics. There are ample opportunities for pupils to carry out mathematical investigations which help them develop reasoning skills and fluency in calculations.

Pupils routinely 'try it' and 'apply it' to deepen their understanding of mathematical concepts. For example, in Year 6, pupils use their knowledge of geometry to work out the hidden shape from the sum of its angles.

- Work is usually pitched well according to pupils' abilities, and many teachers skilfully adapt plans based on how well pupils grasp learning. Occasionally, tasks are not challenging enough for the most able pupils or are too difficult for those who need to catch up. When this happens the pace of learning slows.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. This friendly and welcoming school values and celebrates the contribution of everyone. There are many examples, including how quickly the 30 pupils from other countries, who started school in September 2018, settled into school routines. Highly effective support focuses on developing language skills and supporting the well-being of pupils and their families.
- Care and concern for pupils is a strong thread which runs through the work of all adults in the school. From the delicious school meals produced by the friendly catering team to the attention to cleanliness and safety showed by the caretaker, the welfare and happiness of pupils is at the heart of everyone's work. Pupils report they are listened to and know their views are valued and acted upon. Pupils are very proud of their school.
- Staff treat pupils with great kindness and respect and this is reciprocated. Pupils are taught to value everyone and to celebrate differences. Pupils respond with care and thoughtfulness towards one another. Unkind behaviour is not tolerated and pupils report that bullying is rare. Nevertheless, school staff make sure that pupils learn how to spot the different sorts of bullying and what to do should it occur.
- Opportunities for pupils to take part in extra-curricular activities are plentiful. Pupils choose from a wide range of activities, including computing, science, Lego, sport, choir and dance. These well-planned activities make a big difference to many pupils, enhancing their learning and enjoyment of school.
- Carefully thought out therapeutic strategies are in place to develop pupils' confidence, resilience and perseverance to succeed. This includes supporting pupils to help them regulate their behaviour or prepare them for learning. In the school's sensory room, 'The Nest', pupils have a safe haven and quiet space to reflect and relax. This has a noticeable, positive effect on pupils' emotional well-being.
- Pupils are very helpful and keen to welcome visitors. They readily take on responsibility and take these roles seriously. School councillors conduct surveys to collect pupils' views and act on them. Science ambassadors take responsibility for organising the 'Phiz Lab' and Playground Pals help pupils resolve friendship issues. These roles help pupils develop skills and confidence.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' conduct around the school and in lessons is often exemplary. Pupils are polite, courteous and welcoming to staff, each other and visitors. They willingly engage in conversation and are keen to share what they have been learning.
- In lessons, pupils are attentive and engaged in their tasks. This is because staff cultivate positive relationships with pupils and have made sure that routines are well established. Pupils look to their teachers for inspiration and guidance and are keen to do their best.
- Behaviour outside classrooms is also praiseworthy. Pupils move around the school sensibly and without fuss. Playtimes and lunchtimes are calm, and pupils return to their classrooms ready to learn.
- Incidents of bullying are rare and, if they do occur, are tackled quickly. This was confirmed by pupils who talked with inspectors and also through the school's own thorough records of incidents.
- The attendance of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, has improved and is similar to all schools nationally. The number of pupils who are persistently absent is slightly higher than average but reducing. This is because expectations for attendance and punctuality are high. Pastoral staff are tenacious in following up any absenteeism. They do everything they can to improve the attendance of individual pupils, including collecting pupils on 'the walking bus' and providing them with breakfast. Pupils enjoy these arrangements. As a result, they have a very positive start to their school day and are in the right frame of mind for learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- For the last two years, the progress pupils made in writing and mathematics has been below average in key stage 2. Following the appointment of the headteacher, a root and branch review of all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment was conducted. This resulted in much greater accuracy of what pupils know and can do and identified gaps in their learning. Teaching was sharply focused on helping pupils to catch up. There was also a significant shift in the expectations staff have of pupils' achievements. As a result, progress has improved rapidly. Evidence gathered during the inspection found that current pupils make good progress from their different starting points in all subjects, especially in reading and mathematics.
- Typically, children enter the early years with skills below those expected for their age in many areas of learning. By the end of key stage 1, pupils make good progress, especially in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards was in line with the national average.
- Current school assessment information and work in pupils' books show sustained improvements are being made in key stage 2. In reading and mathematics, progress is accelerating so that a high proportion of pupils are reaching standards expected for their age.
- Pupils' progress in writing lags behind that of reading and few pupils are attaining at

greater depth in writing in Year 6. Leaders have identified that for the significant number of pupils whose first language is not English, the complexities of writing provide a greater challenge than reading or mathematics. Pupils benefit from the support of the trained staff in the 'EAL (English as an additional language) Hub' and make strong progress in acquiring language skills. A consistent approach to the teaching of writing, including spelling, grammar and punctuation, has brought about improvements. However, this remains a priority for the school.

- The pupil premium funding is very well used to support disadvantaged pupils. Differences between this group of pupils' attainment and others are beginning to diminish as these pupils make more rapid progress than non-disadvantaged pupils in school, especially in reading and mathematics. Leaders have identified that this group of pupils had significant gaps in their learning because of the inconsistent quality of teaching lower down the school. Intensive support to accelerate learning is having a positive impact. However, the overall attainment of this group of pupils, although improving well, remains low compared to all pupils nationally.
- Pupils make good progress in a range of other subjects, including science, geography and history. This is because teachers give pupils ample opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in ways that interest and enthuse them.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- The early years provision is outstanding.
- The leader for early years is an excellent role model for the staff whom she manages. She and her team constantly strive to make the learning for children inspiring and teaching is never less than good. Much of it leads to rapid progress and children are well prepared for their transition into Year 1.
- Most children enter the Reception Year with skills and knowledge below those typical for their age. A number start school having only recently arrived in the country and their knowledge of English is limited. By the end of the year, all children have made substantial progress in all areas of learning. An increasing proportion of children are reaching a good level of development.
- Adults think carefully and deeply about the learning environment. It is stimulating and purposeful and engages children very well. Consequently, children make independent choices about their activities. Children cooperate extremely well together. For example, when building a bridge to replicate a scene from their story about 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff', they debate with each other whether to go over or under the bridge and use a tape measure to decide. Children then take turns to play their part in the story.
- Phonics are taught very well. Every opportunity is used to revisit the sounds and the new words children are learning. The singing of rhymes when moving into new activities, and even during snack time, encourages children to practise what they have been taught. Children use their knowledge of sounds when they are reading and writing. Children's books show the substantial progress they make in writing.
- Children, including those who are disadvantaged or with SEND, experience a really good start to life in school. This is because adults assess children's needs carefully and tailor experiences to provide for them.

- Exceptionally strong links with parents help children to settle quickly when they enter the early years provision. When children start school, staff make every effort to get to know them and their families well. They maintain this contact throughout the year and use technology very successfully to secure good communication. Parents are encouraged to play a full and active part in school life.
- Staff keep children safe and care for them well in the early years. They are vigilant in safeguarding children and make swift referrals to the headteacher if they have any concerns. Safeguarding is highly effective because the robust policy and procedures are well known and understood by all staff.

School details

Unique reference number	105777
Local authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	10087820

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	510
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Tamantha Marsh
Headteacher	Garry Johnson
Telephone number	01706 648 174
Website	www.lowerplace.net
Email address	office@lowerplace.rochdale.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–16 March 2017

Information about this school

- The school is larger than average and caters for pupils from aged four to 11 years old and is expanding.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above the national average.
- The large majority of pupils are from minority ethnic groups, with the highest proportion being those of Pakistani heritage. The school is in the top 20% of all schools nationally for the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND who receive additional support is lower than average. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is lower than average.
- There have been changes to the leadership team, including a new headteacher, since the last inspection.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time. They observed learning across all classes and key stages. Some observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors met with a range of staff, including leaders for the provision for pupils with SEND, the early years and subject leaders.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of Rochdale local authority and governors.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, scrutinised their work and talked informally with pupils during breaktimes.
- The views of pupils were also considered during more formal discussions with inspectors and through 77 comments received through the Ofsted pupils' survey.
- Inspectors took account of the school's own surveys of pupils and parents.
- A wide range of the school's own information and documentation was studied, including: the school's own data on progress; self-evaluation and plans to raise attainment; improvement plans and records of the checks made on teaching and learning; records relating to attendance; documents relating to behaviour, safeguarding, a local authority review of provision for pupils with SEND and a whole-school review.
- Information about the performance management of staff and safeguarding practices was also examined, alongside policy documentation.
- The opinions of staff were taken into account through formal and informal discussions and 15 responses made to the Ofsted questionnaire.
- Inspectors spoke to parents in the school and took note of four parents' comments communicated via free text. Too few parents responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, for the results to be valid.

Inspection team

Cathy Parkinson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Sheryl Farnworth	Ofsted Inspector
Clare Nash	Ofsted Inspector

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