

Leedon Lower School

Highfield Road, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 3LZ

Inspection dates

21–22 May 2019

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
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The school's leadership and management structure relies too heavily on the headteacher for securing improvement across the school. Responsibilities are not shared out equitably.
- Leaders, such as those in charge of subjects, have too little involvement in supporting the headteacher in monitoring and helping to improve teaching and the curriculum.
- Governance has improved since the previous inspection. Governors are beginning to offer an increased level of challenge to school leaders.
- Pupils' progress from the end of the Reception Year is inconsistent and too few pupils reach the targets for attainment expected for their age by the end of Year 4.
- Pupils' attainment is weakest in writing. They are not given opportunities to practise and develop their writing skills by using them across the curriculum.
- Teaching is not consistently good across the school. Teachers do not expect enough of pupils.
- There are occasions when work is too hard or too easy for some pupils and, accordingly, they do not move on to the next stage of learning quickly enough.

The school has the following strengths

- Children get off to a good start in the early years. Teaching and the curriculum are well led and managed. Children make good progress.
- The headteacher and staff willingly go the extra mile to support pupils' social and emotional development. Consequently, pupils feel safe and well cared for.
- Leaders have established a strong partnership with parents and carers and the local community. Parents are highly positive about the school's work.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They are friendly, polite and are keen to learn.
- Pupils enjoy their work because they have strong relationships with their teachers. Teachers make learning fun.
- Phonics is taught well in key stage 1.
- The curriculum is planned carefully and is enriched by a good number of clubs and visits. Provision in sport is especially strong.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - establishing a leadership structure where the headteacher can focus on the most important priorities and where responsibility for securing improvement is shared more widely across the school
 - introducing and maintaining a monitoring programme that involves all leaders, including governors, and focuses sharply on improving teaching and checking that initiatives are being applied consistently and are having the desired effect.
- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' learning by ensuring that teachers:
 - have consistently high expectations and plan work that is not too hard for less-able pupils or too easy for the most able
 - respond more quickly when pupils are ready to have their learning moved on.
- Improve the quality of pupils' writing by giving them more opportunities to practise and reinforce their skills in English work and in other subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have not focused successfully on tackling the most important priorities in the school. Good intentions are not yet being translated into good outcomes for pupils.
- Due to budgetary constraints, and despite the school doubling in size in the last four years, the headteacher is the only leader who is not teaching full time and he takes on too much of the responsibility for securing school improvement. Other school leaders, such as those in charge of subjects, are keen to make a difference but have too little involvement in helping the headteacher to secure the necessary improvements.
- Systems for checking teaching and learning and identifying where improvement is needed lack rigour. The headteacher implemented a monitoring programme at the start of the school year in response to the previous inspection. However, it has not been followed through to good effect because the headteacher has been distracted by other issues, such as dealing with high staff absence in the last term. This means that when there have been potentially helpful initiatives, such as the introduction of a new mathematics programme, inconsistencies in implementation have not been picked up, limiting their impact.
- The local authority has increased the level of support in the last year. This is beginning to have a positive impact. The local authority's support is ongoing, especially to establish a more sustainable leadership structure.
- Leaders make effective use of funding to support disadvantaged pupils. They use funding judiciously to ensure that these pupils have access to the same educational experiences as others by, for example, subsidising trips or paying for clubs. They know the individual needs of pupils and put in place specific support to help them. However, while these pupils make similar progress to others in the school, they still do not attain as well as other pupils nationally because of wider weaknesses in the quality of teaching.
- The curriculum is well planned to ensure that pupils learn about a wide range of different subjects. Regular timetabled sessions cover, for example, religious education, physical education (PE), art and music. Teachers successfully make links between different subjects to make learning purposeful, but pupils get too few opportunities to write at length in English or in support of other subjects. Pupils are especially positive about learning Spanish, and they took great delight in demonstrating their skills to the inspection team.
- Sporting provision is also strong, with the PE and sport premium used to good effect. There are strong links with the local sports partnership. Coaches are employed to teach different sports and to improve teachers' skills. Pupils regularly take part in competitive sport and develop good physical prowess.
- The school supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their understanding of life in modern Britain effectively. For example, school council members talk about how they were elected to their positions. Pupils show a mature understanding for their age of the importance of rules and why they are sometimes broken. This understanding, together with the culture of respect and tolerance which underpins all the school's work, prepares pupils well socially for later life.

- The school engages extremely well with parents. Specialist staff such as the learning mentor, together with the drive and passion of the headteacher to meet the needs of all pupils, are important factors in parents' good engagement in school life. Parents are pleased with the education provided by the school. They especially like the caring and nurturing atmosphere, which they feel is a distinctive feature of the school. Parents typically make comments such as, 'My children are very happy and have a wonderful team of staff looking after them' and 'The school has an ethos that makes it a happy learning environment for any child.'

Governance of the school

- The governing body has improved the effectiveness of its work over the last year. Governors have improved their skills by making good use of training from the local authority in areas such as how to interpret and use school data. This means that they now have a more realistic understanding of the current position. They are beginning to play a greater role in holding the school to account, but this aspect of their work is not yet as strong as it should be.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that all staff have a good understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities. They are given regular update training.
- The safeguarding team maintains detailed records of recruitment and the vetting checks on adults who work in the school. It has established good systems for recording and reporting concerns about pupils' well-being. The records allow for patterns of concern to be identified and show that leaders follow these up appropriately to keep pupils safe.
- Leaders work closely with parents and external agencies to keep pupils safe. They are persistent in their pursuit of support for vulnerable families. They communicate well with families and are assiduous in following through any concerns.
- In the Nursery (Little Learners), for children aged two to four years, there are no breaches of early years welfare requirements. Children are kept safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching is not securing good outcomes for pupils. While there is some strong practice across the school, the quality of teaching remains too variable.
- Teaching does not meet differing needs well enough. There are times when teachers do not use their assessments of what pupils already know to help with planning work. Consequently, work is sometimes too hard for the less able and too easy for the most able. When this happens, pupils' progress is too slow.
- Teachers' high expectations of behaviour are not always mirrored in their expectations of how well pupils should achieve over time. This means that there is a wide variation in the quality of work seen across the school.

- Pupils report, and inspectors saw, that teachers do not allow pupils to get on with their work quickly enough when they show that they are ready to get on with it. For example, pupils sometime spend too long listening to the teacher when they have already understood what they need to do next.
- There are strengths to teaching across the school. Teachers foster a positive atmosphere for learning in their classrooms. They manage pupils' behaviour extremely well. Pupils are encouraged to concentrate, work hard and support one another as they learn.
- Phonics is taught well in key stage 1. Pupils enjoy phonics sessions, joining in enthusiastically with the sounds and actions linked to different letters.
- Across the school, teachers plan fun and engaging activities, making good links between subjects to bring learning alive. This is especially strong in Year 2, where independent-learning activities give pupils good opportunities to improve their skills in English and mathematics by working on tasks that emerge from their own interests. In these sessions, role play is well planned and supports pupils in making good progress in communication and language development.
- Teaching assistants are deployed successfully to support and promote learning. They work well with individuals and groups to promote positive attitudes and behaviour. They work effectively with pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The caring approach of senior leaders and those responsible for pupil welfare and support ensures that pupils' emotional needs are met well. Specialist staff are readily available to support pupils or families who need help.
- Staff work hard to raise the aspirations of pupils and to prepare them for the next stage of their education. Pupils learn to be tolerant and respectful. Activities in the forest school, where pupils learn in the outdoor woodland area, help to build character and to teach teamwork.
- Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility so that they develop an understanding of how they can contribute to school life. Members of the school council feel listened to and valued. They have helped in many ways by, for example, working with staff to buy new books for the library.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school because adults are there to help them if needed. They have a good understanding of how to avoid danger in different situations. They talk confidently about the risks associated with using the internet, such as cyber bullying.
- Pupils show a good understanding of different types of bullying. They say that bullying happens only occasionally, but that when it does, staff quickly sort out the issues. School records confirm this.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils have a good understanding of what acceptable behaviour is. They clearly understand the consequences if their behaviour does not meet the school's high expectations. They feel that the school's behaviour policy is applied fairly. They are very positive about how they can win rewards. For example, children in Reception were clearly delighted to share tea with the headteacher as a prize for their good attitudes and behaviour.
- Pupils of all ages demonstrate high levels of tolerance for those pupils who find it more difficult to conform to school rules due to their particular needs. They are patient and kind.
- Pupils work hard in lessons most of the time. They support each other well and happily celebrate their classmates' achievements. Just occasionally, they concentrate less well when teaching does not engage them fully.
- The school has made a concerted effort to improve attendance in the last year and attendance rates have improved significantly. Initiatives such as the collecting of a small number of pupils with the school minibus each morning have been effective in improving attendance and punctuality.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Outcomes require improvement because all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, do not make consistently good progress in key stage 1 or in Years 3 and 4.
- Although improving, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 is below national averages historically. In the current year, as seen in their books, pupils' attainment is still lower than it should be. There is a similar picture in Years 3 and 4, where attainment has risen in the last three years but too few pupils reach the national curriculum attainment targets for their age by the end of Year 4.
- Pupils' attainment is weakest in writing. Although pupils enjoy writing, they have too few opportunities to write at length in English or other subjects.
- Across the school, the levels of challenge for the most able are not high enough. Consequently, few pupils have reached the attainment targets expected for their age by the time they move to middle school at the end of Year 4.
- Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work shows that expectations of the progress that pupils can make are not always high enough in subjects other than English and mathematics, especially science. While pupils produce some good-quality work in history and geography, particularly in Year 2, this is not seen consistently in all classes.
- Recent improvements in teaching mean that pupils are now making good progress in phonics. The proportion reaching the expected level in the national phonics screening check at the end of Year 1, has been increasing and was closer to the national average in 2018 than previously.

Early years provision

Good

- Early years provision is a strength of the school, with children's needs met well. Attainment at the end of the Reception Year has been rising. Although a lower-than-average proportion of children reached a good level of development in 2018, this reflected good progress from often low starting points.
- Children continue to make good progress in the current year. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education in Year 1. They gain good levels of confidence, behave well and learn new skills quickly.
- Children are taught well in the Nursery and the Reception classes. Adults have a good understanding of how young children learn. They plan work that builds well on individual starting points. Adult interventions are timely, with good questioning helping to move learning on. Adults ensure that there is good challenge for different groups of pupils throughout the school day, although just occasionally the most able are not stretched enough.
- There is a strong and successful focus in the Nursery on children's social development, so that they are well prepared for life in the Reception Year. There is a delightful atmosphere in the Nursery, with children supporting each other well and playing together happily. Outdoor learning is well integrated into daily practice, with children encouraged to explore their own ideas. Children engage well with recently introduced yoga sessions, following instructions carefully and showing good respect for each other's space.
- In the Reception Year, children's early language skills are taught particularly well. Good-quality phonics teaching gives children a good start in learning to read and write. Adults take every opportunity to encourage children to talk about their learning in order to improve their speaking skills and to increase their vocabulary.
- In both year groups, additional adults are deployed well. They have a good impact on learning when, for example, taking phonics session in the Reception Year or working with small groups in the Nursery.
- Provision in both the Nursery and Reception Year is well led and managed. The two leaders work together well to identify what they need to improve next. This is based on a good understanding of the needs of the children. For example, there is a current focus on giving number a higher focus throughout the day, as this is an area of comparative weakness in children's attainment.
- Staff give safeguarding a high priority in both the Nursery and Reception classes. They regularly check provision to ensure that it is safe.
- Leaders have established a good partnership with parents. They speak highly about provision and how well their children are being supported in school. Typical comments include, 'The staff are very supportive' and 'My daughter loves coming to school each day.'

School details

Unique reference number	109509
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10087441

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	402
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nicola McIntyre
Headteacher	Richard Benson
Telephone number	01525 374713
Website	www.leedonlowerschool.co.uk
Email address	leedon@leedonlowerschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 July 2018

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized lower school, with 14 classes. Children in the early years are taught in three Reception classes and a Nursery which takes children on a full- or part-time basis.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is broadly average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is broadly average.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning in lessons, some of which were observed jointly with the headteacher or other senior leaders. In addition, the inspectors made several short visits to observe learning at other times.
- Discussions were held with pupils, staff and members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors took account of the views of 34 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also talked with parents at the end of the school day.
- The inspectors listened to pupils read, looked at their work and at school documents, including the school's own information about pupils' learning and progress; planning and monitoring documents; the school development plan; records relating to behaviour and attendance; safeguarding information; and health and safety documentation.
- The inspectors analysed responses to inspection questionnaires from 24 members of staff and from 87 pupils.

Inspection team

Mike Capper, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Kevin Rae	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Cox	Ofsted Inspector

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