

Lowton Church of England High School

Newton Road, Lowton, Warrington, Cheshire WA3 1DU

Inspection dates

25–26 June 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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Some leaders have an overgenerous view about the quality of education that pupils receive.
- Leaders pay insufficient attention to the impact of their actions on improving pupils' progress and attainment.
- Although outcomes for pupils have improved since the previous inspection, the curriculum in the past has not supported some pupils in key stage 4 to achieve the standards of which they are capable.
- Some groups of pupils underachieve at key stage 4. This is particularly the case for boys and middle-ability pupils.
- Although diminishing, differences remain in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally at the end of key stage 4.
- Some teachers do not expect the best of pupils. This is especially evident in the work of some boys. Some pupils do not commit fully to improving their work.
- At times, teaching does not routinely address the misconceptions some pupils hold.
- There are differences in how well teaching supports those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to make good progress.

The school has the following strengths

- The strong Christian ethos of the school promotes respectful relationships between pupils and staff. Pupils behave and attend well.
- Members of the governing body have shown strong leadership. They have been extremely diligent in their duty to hold senior leaders to account for their actions.
- Leaders have secured considerable improvements in the quality of teaching in mathematics since the previous inspection.
- Leaders have made improvements to the quality of teaching. More pupils in key stage 3 are making good progress across a range of subjects.
- Leaders use Year 7 catch-up funding effectively to support those pupils who join the school with weak literacy and numeracy skills.
- Leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective. Pupils feel safe in school and bullying is very rare.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - senior leaders use a reliable range of evidence to inform their view of the quality of education that pupils receive
 - senior leaders understand how well their actions affect pupils' progress and attainment across the school
 - senior leaders' plans to improve the school include the correct priorities and clear milestones to measure success.
- Improve the quality of teaching, so that different groups of pupils make the progress of which they are capable by ensuring that:
 - teachers expect the very best from pupils, and especially from boys
 - teachers identify and address pupils' misconceptions, particularly for those pupils in key stage 4 who are disadvantaged
 - teachers insist that pupils, particularly boys and middle-ability pupils, commit fully to improving their work
 - pupils with SEND receive high-quality support across the curriculum that enables them to learn successfully and make the progress they should.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have improved many aspects of the school since the previous inspection. These include improvements in: the quality of teaching; the level of challenge provided by the key stage 3 curriculum; the teaching of mathematics and more effective use of the Year 7 catch-up funding. All of these were aspects prioritised for improvement by inspectors at the previous inspection.
- Despite improvements across the school, leaders have been unable to secure a consistently good quality of education for pupils. Weaknesses in some aspects of leadership have hampered the pace of improvement. For example, leaders thought that outcomes for pupils were improving quickly. This is because, in some subjects, teachers' assessments of pupils' progress were unreliable. Leaders have acted to check that teachers' assessments of pupils' progress are now accurate.
- Some senior leaders have an overgenerous view about the quality of education that pupils receive. This is because they have not based their view of the school on a wide range of evidence, particularly the evidence that relates to pupils' progress in key stage 4. Due to weaknesses in the quality of teaching, some groups of pupils in key stage 4 continue to underachieve, particularly the boys and disadvantaged pupils.
- Senior leaders have implemented several strategies to improve the quality of education for pupils. For instance, there have been improvements in senior leaders' systems to hold middle leaders to account. However, some senior leaders are overly focused on the actions they have taken rather than evaluating the impact of their actions on pupils' progress and attainment. As a result, plans to improve the school are insufficiently targeted at the correct priorities and lack clear milestones to measure success.
- Middle leaders have an accurate understanding of the weaknesses in pupils' progress in their subjects. They check regularly that their actions are having a positive effect on outcomes for pupils. Some middle leaders have been particularly effective in improving the quality of teaching. This is particularly the case in humanities and mathematics.
- Leaders have a clear rationale for the design of the curriculum. They ensure that pupils benefit from a broad and academic range of subjects. This is especially the case in key stage 3, where pupils benefit from a more challenging curriculum than at the time of the previous inspection. Nonetheless, in some subjects, the curriculum does not support some pupils to achieve the standards of which they are capable. A lack of challenge across the curriculum previously means that some pupils in key stage 4 have gaps in their learning. Consequently, some pupils in key stage 4 are unable to build on their knowledge effectively and apply it to more complex learning.
- Staff explained to inspectors that they feel well supported by middle and senior leaders. Teachers appreciate the opportunity to reflect upon and improve their teaching practice. They appreciate leaders' efforts to avoid placing unnecessary workload burdens on staff.
- Increasingly, leaders are using additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils more effectively. There have been considerable improvements in the attendance and behaviour of this group of pupils. There are also systems in place to ensure that this

group of pupils receive appropriate support with their learning. Improvements in the accuracy of teachers' assessment mean that teaching is identifying and addressing more gaps in the knowledge of disadvantaged pupils. This is especially the case at key stage 3, where the progress that disadvantaged pupils make is improving. Nonetheless, some disadvantaged pupils in key stage 4 have gaps in their learning that hamper their progress.

- Leaders have acted to secure improvements in the progress made by pupils with SEND. This group of pupils benefit from a wide range of nurturing pastoral support. Consequently, they are less likely to be excluded than they were at the time of the previous inspection. Leaders monitor the progress made by this group of pupils. Those pupils who fall behind in their learning receive help targeted to their individual needs. Effective systems are in place to ensure that pupils with SEND are identified quickly. Leaders ensure that staff have relevant information to support this group of pupils. However, not enough attention has been given to ensuring that the support this group receive with their learning is of a consistently high quality.
- A wide range of extra-curricular activities including clubs in computing, chess and sports complement the curriculum well. Pupils have a variety of opportunities to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. For example, through the personal, social, health education (PSHE) curriculum pupils learn about the importance of diversity. Leaders ensure that there are a range of cultural opportunities for pupils to participate in, such as theatrical productions and a successful school choir. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders have forged effective links with parents and carers. Most parents feel that they receive valuable information about their children's progress, and they would recommend the school.
- Leaders now use catch-up funding more effectively to support those pupils in Year 7 who join the school with weak literacy and numeracy skills. Additional support for pupils is helping more pupils to access the curriculum at key stage 3.

Governance of the school

- Members of the governing body have been highly effective in their duty of holding senior leaders to account. They have a comprehensive and accurate view of all aspects of the school's performance.
- Governors have high aspirations for pupils. To this end, they ask appropriate and challenging questions of senior leaders. Members of the governing body do not shy away from making difficult decisions. They have challenged some senior leaders about their overgenerous views of the school. Governors continue to challenge senior leaders about the judgements that they make about the quality of education that pupils receive.
- The governing body use their knowledge and experience well to promote the school's Christian ethos. They are committed to maintaining the school's culture of inclusivity, tolerance and respect for diversity.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure that there are suitable systems in place to check that adults in the school are safe to work with pupils. Staff benefit from regular safeguarding training. They understand the procedures they must follow if they have concerns about a pupil.
- Leaders have systems in place to check that safeguarding arrangements used by any alternative providers are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Leaders have made several changes to improve teaching since the previous inspection. These actions have raised the quality of teaching in many subjects. This is especially the case in key stage 3 and for mathematics. However, the quality of teaching is not consistently good across subjects and year groups.
- Weak teaching in the past means that some pupils in key stage 4, including those who are disadvantaged, do not have the knowledge that they need to achieve the high standards of which they are capable. Many teachers are skilled in using accurate assessment information to ensure that they identify and address the gaps in pupils' learning. However, this good practice is inconsistent, and some teachers do not routinely address pupils' misconceptions.
- Teaching assistants know pupils well. There are times when teaching assistants provide effective support for pupils. However, on occasions, support from teaching assistants is not effective in helping pupils with SEND to overcome their specific barriers to learning. As a result, sometimes these pupils do not make good progress.
- Teachers have established supportive relationships and they often provide high-quality support for pupils about how to improve their work, for example in English. However, not all pupils use the help and support provided by their teachers to improve their work. This is particularly the case for boys. Many boys do not commit fully to improving their work.
- Some teachers have high expectations of pupils, for example in history where pupils in Year 7 grapple with ideas and provide confident responses to challenging questions. However, some teachers do not expect the very best from pupils. As a result, some pupils do not complete their work to the best of their ability, and they submit work that is poor in quality.
- Most teachers use their strong subject knowledge to sequence learning effectively for pupils in key stage 3. As a result, pupils can build on their prior learning and apply their knowledge to more complex situations, for example in mathematics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils explained to inspectors that they feel safe in school. Most staff and parents share this

view. Pupils appreciate the wide range of opportunities to learn about keeping themselves safe, including when online.

- For the most part, pupils demonstrate highly positive attitudes to their learning. Where teachers demand the best of pupils, they rise to the challenge and they are keen to learn. Pupils show respect and listen politely to the views of their peers.
- Pupils who spoke with inspectors report that incidents of bullying, including racist and homophobic bullying, are extremely rare. They are confident that any incidents would be dealt with effectively by staff. Leaders' documentation confirms that is the case. Pupils explained how the school's inclusive culture means they feel they can be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- There are opportunities for pupils to learn about being responsible citizens. For example, pupils in Year 10 learn about looking after their finances. Pupils learn about how to stay healthy as part of the PSHE curriculum. Many pupils are involved in charity events. They understand their role in helping others, which supports their moral development. Pupils are keen to develop their leadership skills by being a member of the school council.
- Pupils benefit from a range of effective careers education, information, advice and guidance. All pupils, but particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, receive help and support to prepare them for further education, employment or training. Pupils appreciate the opportunity to visit local colleges and employers. They use these visits to learn more about the opportunities available when they leave the school.
- Leaders check on the welfare of those pupils who attend alternative provision. Leaders ensure that this small group of pupils receive appropriate careers education, information, advice and guidance.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They move around the school calmly and are polite and respectful to their teachers. Most pupils, staff and parents share this view. Pupils are confident that staff will challenge any incidents of poor behaviour and deal with this effectively.
- Rates of pupils' absence are broadly in line with the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving quickly towards the national average. Leaders use a range of effective strategies to maintain and improve pupils' attendance.
- The proportion of pupils who are excluded from school for a fixed period is broadly in line with national averages. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND who are excluded is reducing. This is because of the effective support that these groups of pupils receive from staff. The proportion of pupils who are permanently excluded from school is in line with the national average.
- Leaders have effective systems in place to check on the behaviour and attendance of those pupils who attend alternative provision.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The proportion of pupils achieving a strong pass in English and mathematics increased in 2018. The progress made by this group of pupils in English, science and humanities was in line with pupils nationally. The small proportion of pupils who studied a modern foreign language made excellent progress. However, published information for 2018 shows that pupils at the end of key stage 4 did not make good progress across a range of subjects, including mathematics. Boys and disadvantaged pupils fared worse than their peers nationally.
- Leaders' assessment information and work in pupils' books show that the progress made by current pupils is improving. This is especially the case in mathematics. Improvements in the quality of teaching in mathematics mean that more teachers sequence learning well, and most pupils can build upon their prior knowledge. However, some groups of pupils in key stage 4 continue to underachieve across the curriculum. This is especially the case for boys and middle-ability pupils.
- Work in pupils' books shows that pupils in key stage 3 are making greater gains in their learning than their counterparts in key stage 4. This is because leaders have made improvements to the key stage 3 curriculum. The key stage 3 curriculum now offers a higher level of challenge for pupils. Consequently, more younger pupils are working at the standards of which they are capable, and they are better prepared for the demands of key stage 4. This is especially the case for the most able pupils.
- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils is improving, especially in key stage 3. This is because of leaders' increasingly effective use of additional funding. That said, some disadvantaged pupils in key stage 4 have gaps in their knowledge due to weaker teaching in the past and this restricts their progress.
- Pupils with SEND make greater gains in their learning than at the time of the previous inspection. The progress made by this group of pupils is improving. This is because of effective leadership in this area alongside improvements in the quality of teaching, particularly at key stage 3. Nonetheless, in some subjects, some pupils with SEND do not receive enough high-quality support to overcome the challenges that they face.
- Pupils benefit from a well-planned programme of careers education, information, advice and guidance. This means that the proportion of pupils moving on to further education, employment or training has increased since the previous inspection. Nonetheless, many pupils have not achieved the high standards of which they are capable at key stage 4. This places some restrictions on the choices open to them when they leave the school.

School details

Unique reference number	137783
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10087862

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	578
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rosemary Johnston
Headteacher	Julian Pollard
Telephone number	01942 767 040
Website	www.lowtonhs.wigan.sch.uk/
Email address	enquiries@lowtonhs.wigan.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–14 December 2016

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller-than-average secondary school. Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is in line with the national average.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision at Oakfield High School, Fix It UK Ltd, Fir Tree Fisheries and the School of Military.
- The school had a section 48 inspection in March 2015.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning and scrutinised pupils' work across year groups and subjects. Inspectors spoke with pupils during social times and between lessons. They also spoke formally with four groups of pupils.
- Inspectors considered 126 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. This included written responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text facility. They also considered 36 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.
- The inspection team considered a wide variety of documentation. This included the school's improvement plan, the school's own information about the progress of current pupils, attendance information and documentation relating to safeguarding and governance.
- The lead inspector met with two representatives of the local authority and some members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors met with several staff including the headteacher, senior leaders, a group of middle leaders and a group of teachers. They also spoke with other members of the school staff. An inspector spoke on the telephone with members of staff from some alternative providers used by the school.

Inspection team

Emma Gregory, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Timothy Gartside	Ofsted Inspector
Christine Veitch	Ofsted Inspector
Linda Griffiths	Ofsted Inspector

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