

Lowton Junior and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106421
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	324396
Inspection dates	10–11 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Angela Westington HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	122
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr A Dutton
Headteacher	Mrs M Silcock
Date of previous school inspection	June 2006
School address	Newton Road Lowton Warrington WA3 2AW
Telephone number	01942 673213
Fax number	01942 673213
Email address	enquiries@admin.lowtonprimary.wigan.sch.uk

Age group	4–11
Inspection date(s)	10–11 February 2009
Inspection number	324396

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out at no notice by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector visited 10 lessons, one assembly, observed meal time arrangements and held meetings with the vice chair of governors, a representative of the local authority, staff and pupils. She observed the school's work, looked at a selection of documentation including minutes of the meetings of the governing body, the school's procedures for safeguarding, the school's development plans, the systems for monitoring pupils' progress, internal data on examination results and attendance, external reviews of the school's work and a wide range of the school's policies. The inspector examined pupils' books and examined a case study that illustrated how the school works in partnership with parents and other agencies to support vulnerable pupils. She also scrutinised questionnaires that were completed by 27 parents.

The inspection reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the standards reached in writing, especially by boys
- pupils' outcomes across a broad range of aspects
- the curriculum
- improvement since the previous inspection.

Information about the school

Lowton Junior and Infant School is a smaller than average primary school, which serves a mixed socio-economic area in Wigan. Pupils are taught in a Reception Class and three mixed-aged classes: Years 1 and 2; Years 3 and 4; and Years 5 and 6. Almost all pupils are from a White British background and there are none for whom English is an additional language. A quarter of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is more than the national average. There are more boys than girls in the school and in some classes the imbalance is significant. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly above the national figure. More pupils than is usual are admitted into the school during Key Stage 2.

The school has gained several awards including: ECO Green Flag Award; Healthy Schools Status; Activemark and Gold SSSCo Award for PE and School Sport.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Lowton Junior and Infant School is a very happy school where the children are exceptionally well cared for and feel safe. Parents are, rightly, highly supportive of the school and its work. More families than is usual transfer their children into the school at Key Stage 2 and surveys of their views reveal an extremely high satisfaction rate with the move. The school knows its pupils and families well and it provides outstanding pastoral care and support for its most vulnerable pupils.

Pupils' academic achievement overall is satisfactory and many outcomes are good. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. In writing especially, some boys do not reach the standards that they should. This is particularly so in Years 1 and 2.

The school's curriculum is good and improving. Although not identified as an issue for concern at the previous inspection, since that time much work has been undertaken to reorganise the teaching of the National Curriculum subjects and to enhance the curriculum generally. The school reacted promptly to an Ofsted music survey inspection in June 2008 which identified some shortcomings in music provision. Progress on the areas identified for improvement in the inspection of 2006 (science and information and communication technology (ICT)) has been good. Both subjects are now well embedded in the school's planning and contribute significantly to pupils' enjoyment. As a result, standards in both subjects have risen.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall but variable. The strongest teaching is now in Key Stage 2, a reverse of the position noted in the previous inspection, reflecting the work undertaken to improve teaching here. The school has worked very hard to improve standards in English, especially writing and has had some success, particularly in the current Years 4 to 6, where standards are rising. However, it has not yet looked in detail at the teaching of early writing and this oversight is affecting boys disproportionately.

The school's evaluation has been broadly accurate and it has identified correctly several areas for improvement, although not the need to improve the teaching of early writing. Where the school has focused its attention there has been improvement in provision. There have been improvements in outcomes for pupils too in some instances, but not for all. As a result, the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the teaching of early writing and ensure that more boys gain Level 2b or above in writing by the end of Year 2 by:
 - implementing a systematic programme for teaching phonics in Reception and Years 1 and 2
 - improving the teaching of handwriting and presentation skills for all pupils, but especially in Reception and Years 1 and 2
 - ensuring pupils in Years 1 and 2 undertake some writing daily.
- Increase the proportion of boys gaining Level 4 in writing by the end of Year 6 by ensuring that the gaps in their knowledge, as identified above, are filled.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

3

The standards reached by pupils by age eleven, as seen in lessons and in their books, are broadly average. However, they are variable and not all pupils reach the standards that they should, boys especially. This represents satisfactory progress given their starting points on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils' progress is variable also: they make more progress in some classes than in others.

This picture reflects the school's results for seven and eleven year olds in the national tests and the school's own internal data. Over the past five years, the school's results at Key Stage 2 have been broadly average in English, mathematics and science although with a slight decline overall. In 2008, however, the results dipped markedly and, for the first time, the English and mathematics figures fell below the Government's minimum levels. Analysis of the data reveals that the dip was due to the performance of boys. Fewer than half of the boys gained Level 4 in writing compared with three quarters of the girls. In contrast, boys and girls performed equally well in science, and as well as their peers nationally. In Key Stage 1, there has been a trend of gradual improvement in the national assessments, most obviously in mathematics and reading so that the school's 2008 results were at the national average. Improvement in writing has been much slower and results for this remain below the national figure. Boys' underachievement in writing in the Key Stage 1 assessments is marked.

Pupils say that they enjoy school and parents confirmed this view. Attendance is in line with the national figure and, at the time of this inspection, had improved on the previous year. The school has a very small number of pupils for whom persistent absence is a problem; it knows these pupils very well and manages their attendance

appropriately.

The pupils at Lowton are delightfully chatty and engaging, a reflection of how very safe and secure they feel. The school takes its responsibilities in this area very seriously and monitors pupils' views assiduously. Pupils are confident that their voices will be heard and that adults around them will listen to them. They are comfortable and happy in lessons. Parents overwhelmingly express the view that should an issue arise they are confident that the school will deal with it promptly.

Pupils' behaviour is good; they are caring and supportive of each other and through their various roles and responsibilities they learn to look after one another and make a very positive contribution to school life. There is keen competition via a formal application process to gain a post as a playleader or a buddy. At lunchtimes and during the breakfast club, older pupils mix with and play with younger ones. Pupils are very aware of the importance of good health; the result of much work by the school to increase the amount of PE and sport undertaken in school, after-school clubs and links with local organisations. Pupils enjoy participating in the cross country events and the local PE festival. The take-up of school meals though, hovers around 50%. The school reports a decline in take-up when the price rises. Nevertheless, pupils were able to explain to the inspector what they should bring to school in their healthy lunchbox: chocolate biscuits yes! bars of chocolate no!

Members of the school council were extremely keen to tell the inspector about their fundraising activities for priorities that pupils themselves had identified; for example, wet playtime equipment and about raising funds for charities. In particular, the magazine, 'Tuti Fruiti' – devised, written, produced and sold by a group of pupils – was hugely enjoyed by pupils generally and was a constant source of discussion. Pupils' social and moral development are real strengths. The inspector observed Year 5 and 6 pupils discussing and researching disabilities. Their willingness to reflect upon the needs of others, to discuss negative stereotypes and to consider how disabled people might be helped, was very moving.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	3
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	3
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

What is the extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	3
--	---

The quality of the school’s work

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There is good teaching but also some that does not meet the needs of all pupils sufficiently. The school has improved resources and staff skills in ICT and, in several lessons observed, pupils used computers confidently to support their work. As a result of the school’s efforts and investments, standards in ICT are rising.

Pupils in Reception and Years 1 and 2 do not acquire the letter /sound knowledge and handwriting skills that they need to write efficiently and quickly. The school has an extensive tracking system to monitor pupils’ progress and has identified some underachievement. However, it has yet to focus on the development of early writing skills. Older pupils are aware of their targets but not all are clear about how to improve their work.

The school’s commitment to, and arrangements for, the support and welfare of its pupils are outstanding. In Lowton School each child is known and cared for. The school works exceedingly well with external agencies, parents and carers to help pupils from vulnerable families. In some cases, the school is the first point of monitoring and support for vulnerable children.

The breakfast club is organised and managed by the school and is popular with parents and pupils. It offers a good range of healthy breakfasts and activities for pupils who attend. Relationships between the supervising adults and children are good. The club ensures a secure start to the day for those pupils who attend.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	3
Effective assessment	3
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	2
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

This is a small school and most teaching staff carry leadership and management roles. All are committed to securing improvement in the school’s provision and for individual pupils. School improvement planning is good and progress towards identified priorities is regularly monitored. The school has established a two team management system to share the workload and this works well. As a result, where the school has focused its energies, there is discernible improvement.

The school takes good account of the views of users: parents and pupils. Relationships with parents are very positive and they report that they are kept well informed about developments. The school has good links with partners in the

community and local secondary schools which contribute to pupils' educational achievement and well-being.

The governing body discharges its statutory responsibilities and knows the school's strengths and weaknesses. It is rigorous in ensuring that safeguarding and other requirements are met. Governors have ensured that the school has made a satisfactory response to the requirement to promote community cohesion. They have undertaken the necessary assessment of the school's community and context; produced an appropriate action plan to promote community cohesion and have begun to evaluate the impact of this work. At the time of this inspection, all statutory duties in respect of safeguarding were met. Risk assessments are up to date and the school has clear policies to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	2
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	3
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	2
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	3
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	2
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	3
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

From starting points which are generally below those expected for their age, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress and achieve well, so that by the end of the Reception Year most are working at the expected levels for this age group. They make most gains in mathematical development and early reading. Children enjoy the Reception activities and are keen to be involved. This is because the adults know them well and provide activities that spark their interest. For example, the installation of a full size tent in the 'camp site' and various bird-watching equipment! Like elsewhere in the school, the staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage work hard to engage boys and the choice of equipment and activities in the unit reflects this. Regular assessments inform the planning of sessions and move children on well. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. There are some missed opportunities for children to practise and reinforce what they have been taught, for example to apply their knowledge of letters and sounds in writing activities and to use a wider range of writing equipment than is currently the case.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are safe and are well cared for. The unit is well led and managed. The well organised and popular breakfast club ensures suitable attention is given to the needs of Reception aged children who attend.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	2
Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2

Views of parents and carers

Twenty seven questionnaires were received of which twenty one had written comments. All bar one was highly appreciative of the work of the school, in particular the welcoming and approachable manner of the headteacher and her staff. Parents were fulsome in their praise for the level of care shown to their children. One parent summed up her views thus: 'With Mrs Silcock at the head of a wonderful team the school has gone from strength to strength. They concentrate not solely on academic achievement but on developing the whole child, helping him or her to cope with what lies ahead.'

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



12 February 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Lowton Junior and Infant School, Lowton, WA3 2AW

As you know, I visited your school recently. I would like to thank you for talking to me and making me feel so welcome. I send a big thank you especially to the school council members who came to talk to me. I promised that I would write to you and here is the letter!

I looked at many of the things you do in school and talked with many of you, your teachers and some of the people who help you. I could tell that you and your families are very proud of your school; and so you should be. Here are some of the things I liked about your school.

- Mrs Silcock and the teachers and adults in your school work very hard to make sure that you are well looked after and feel safe. Your parents and some of you told me that you feel safe at school and this is very important.
- You behave well, you care for each other and take on responsibilities.
- You enjoy fundraising. I loved the 'Tuti Fruiti' magazine!! It's so colourful with super cartoons inside ... and what a bargain at only 41p. 😊
- You are getting better at science and ICT. You have some really interesting lessons and you told me how much you enjoy them.

I have asked Mrs Silcock and the teachers to look again at how they teach writing, especially for the younger children. I have asked them to do this because I think more of you could do better in your writing, particularly some of the boys. I have also asked them to see if more of the boys can get better results in writing because I am confident they can and some of you told me that you want to get better at writing.

I am sure that you will continue to work hard and will help Mrs Silcock and the teachers when they start to make the changes that are needed. I really enjoyed my time at Lowton and meeting you all.

Yours sincerely

Angela Westington
Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.