

# Lowton Church of England High School

Newton Road, Lowton, Wigan, WA3 1DU

**Inspection dates** 27–28 February 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Although it is now beginning to accelerate, students' progress is not as good as it should be, particularly in mathematics. From average attainment on entry to the school, students reach broadly average standards by the time they leave. Achievement, therefore, requires improvement.
- The quality of teaching is sometimes inconsistent. Teachers' questioning, for example, is not always searching enough to require students to think more deeply about their work and thus get the best out of them.
- It is too early to see the full impact of strategies established to develop students' skills in literacy and numeracy further in all subjects of the curriculum.
- On occasions, work and activities in class do not enable students of all abilities to make good and better progress in their studies.
- There are insufficient opportunities for students to be more independent in their learning and thus take greater responsibility for their own progress.
- There are inconsistencies in the quality of feedback and students are sometimes not sure of how they can improve their work.
- Some students and parents are not fully aware of the importance of regular attendance.

### The school has the following strengths

- The dedicated headteacher, supported well by a committed senior leadership team, has put in place well-thought-out policies which are beginning to improve students' achievement. Students' progress in vocational subjects and in physical education is good.
- Teaching is improving steadily, as a result of a strong emphasis on the sharing of good and exemplary classroom practice. Heads of academic and pastoral departments are now taking the lead in promoting ongoing improvement in their areas.
- Students are proud of their school, feel safe within it and behave well. They speak highly of the staff who work with them and believe that the LEARN initiative in Key Stage 3 is doing much to raise their confidence and self-esteem.
- Specialist status in sport has a positive impact in all areas of school life. Through the extensive student leadership programme local primary schools benefit from a range of sports activities led by Lowton students.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 34 lessons or part-lessons. Two observations were made jointly with the assistant headteacher with specific responsibility for improving teaching.
- Inspectors held meetings with four groups of students. They also spoke to three members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, the special educational needs co-ordinator, pastoral leaders, heads of academic departments and the senior leadership team. In addition, they met with staff responsible for the development of specialist sports college status.
- They also took account of the 31 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and of the 28 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed the school at work and looked at students' assignments during lessons, internal and external students' progress and attainment data, school improvement planning and the school's procedures to enable it to gain an accurate view of its performance.
- They scrutinised minutes of governing body meetings, departmental analyses of academic performance and documentation in relation to performance management and staff training opportunities. In addition, they considered a range of information on child protection, safeguarding, attendance and behaviour.

## Inspection team

James Kidd, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Janet Peckett	Additional Inspector
Paul Rafferty	Additional Inspector
Clarice Nelson-Rowe	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average-sized secondary school, which opened as a Church of England high school in January 2012.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those from service families, is broadly average.
- Most students are of White British heritage but there is an increasing number of students from Eastern Europe. The percentage of students with English as an additional language is well below average.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is just below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above that usually seen.
- The school holds specialist status in sport.
- Increasing numbers of students attend vocational programmes at local colleges in the Wigan and Leigh areas.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality and consistency of teaching so that more is good or better in order to further accelerate students' progress and raise attainment, particularly in mathematics, by:
  - ensuring that teachers' questioning requires students to think more deeply about the topics they are studying and thus gets the best out of them
  - providing students with work and activities which enable students of all abilities to make consistently good and better progress in their studies
  - giving students more opportunities to find things out for themselves and thus take greater responsibility for their own learning
  - building upon the strategies already established to develop students' skills in literacy and numeracy further in all subjects
  - ensuring feedback in class and in marking is consistently good and provides students with accurate advice on how they can improve their work.
- Raise attendance more rapidly by establishing clear expectations for all, including parents, of the vital importance of regular attendance.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Students generally enter Year 7 with broadly average attainment in English and mathematics. By the end of Year 11 standards in both these subjects are broadly in line with those seen nationally and students' achievement, therefore, requires improvement. The vast majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire are satisfied with the progress their children are making, but a significant number believe it could be better.
- Students' progress in both subjects is now beginning to accelerate, but inspection evidence shows that the proportion of students making expected or even better than expected progress in mathematics is not as good as it should be. The 2012 GCSE results in mathematics were disappointing. This was partly the result of the early examination entry of more-able students, many of whom did not reach their targets and, therefore, did not attain the higher GCSE grades their ability warranted. The school has amended its examination entry policy and there is now no early entry for GCSE.
- Students' progress in English is accelerating more quickly than in mathematics but it is still not as strong as it should be. In Year 10, for example, more-able students justify with confidence their views on the impact of posters relating to Macbeth. Middle-ability students in Year 11 make extended and well-founded comment when exploring the themes of peace and conflict in Romeo and Juliet. In addition, students of all abilities in Year 8 define and use key subject vocabulary, 'alliteration' and 'personification', for example, when analysing the key features of a brochure.
- Students make good progress in vocational subjects, including when following a variety of programmes in local colleges. Achievement in physical education (PE) is also good and, in 2012, all students entered for the GCSE examination reached at least grade C.
- The school's wide-ranging use of pupil premium funding - one-to-one tuition and homework and coursework support for groups of students, for example - has a positive impact on the attainment of students known to be eligible for free school meals. As a result, the gaps between the standards reached by these students and other students in school are closing.
- The individual needs of disabled students and those with special educational needs are identified early. Extra support is provided rapidly and these students make the same progress as their peers. There is a similar picture for those students from Eastern Europe who are at early stages of learning English: good support here enables them to take full advantage of what the school has to offer.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Teaching is improving steadily but its quality is still inconsistent within subjects and across the school. Nonetheless, there are examples of good and outstanding teaching in both key stages. The PE department has taken the lead in delivering well-received and effective training to staff on how teaching can improve further. In addition, the school has introduced strategies to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills further across the curriculum, but it is too early to see the full impact of these.
- In most lessons relationships between students and between students and the adults who work with them are strong. Students believe that teaching is better than it was twelve months ago and, although a significant minority believe it could be better, the majority of parents are satisfied with the teaching their children receive.
- In lessons where teaching is good or better, in a Year 10 science lesson on blood vessels, for example, where teaching was graded outstanding, teachers have secure knowledge of their subjects, the pace of learning is brisk and teachers expect the best from their students. Similarly, in lessons such as these, students are fully aware of what they need to do to make good or better progress and they are very keen to get on with their work. They are given many opportunities to work in pairs or in groups and they enjoy supporting each other with their

learning.

- In lessons where teaching requires improvement teachers do not always ask searching enough questions of their students to enable them to think more deeply about their learning and therefore to get the best out of them. In a minority of lessons, too, work and activities are not matched well enough to what students need in order to make good and better progress: for some the work is too easy and for others it is too hard. Although there are examples of students taking responsibility for their own progress, too often they do not have sufficient opportunities to research and to find things out for themselves.
- Through the focused learning assessments students gauge their own progress and also the progress of their classmates. However, the quality of teachers' marking and feedback during lessons varies from exemplary practice comprising detailed advice on how students can do better next time to brief comments. As a result, students are not always fully aware of how to improve their work.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- All students speak with one voice about the impact of the LEARN initiative, which promotes students' self-discipline and which encourages them to take a more mature approach to all areas of school life. Students rightly believe this initiative continues to have a positive effect on behaviour, on their attitudes to learning and on their self-esteem. Although the programme has only been introduced into Key Stage 3, older students are also aware of its impact. As one student in Year 11 said, 'There is now more mutual respect between students and staff and we have also been taught to respect ourselves.' The vast majority of parents believe their children are safe and happy in school.
- The house system is well organised, promotes warm relationships between the school and families and ensures that the school is a safe and orderly place to learn. Students have a high regard for heads of house and student support managers. Students are courteous to visitors, are delighted to show them round school and enjoy talking to them about their work. Although there are isolated incidents of off-task behaviour, students generally respond well to the expectations their teachers have of them.
- Students feel safe in school and make particularly positive comments about the student support suite which, they say, 'helps us to feel better about ourselves'. They say that bullying is rare and they have a keen understanding of the dangers of bullying in all its forms, including homophobia and other bullying based on prejudice.
- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Students have a good understanding of religions and cultures which are different from their own and value the links with the school in Uganda. They support a wide range of charities and, through the sports leadership programmes delivered through specialist status, lead a variety of sports and games in local primary schools. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sport. There are regular drama productions which are very popular among students and the local community.
- Attendance is monitored closely and there is immediate follow-up of unexplained absences. Attendance is broadly average but is not improving as rapidly as it could as a result of some students and parents not being fully aware of the importance of regular attendance.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- Teaching is improving and achievement is beginning to accelerate as a result of a range of effective initiatives introduced by the well-informed headteacher and senior leadership team, all of whom have high ambitions for the school and who know it well. The duties of heads of academic and pastoral departments are now clearer and these staff are promoting ongoing

improvements in the areas for which they are responsible.

- The leadership of teaching is good and focused staff training, including the 'Learning Threes' programme, enables staff to share good and exemplary classroom practice with their colleagues across the school. In the words of middle leaders, 'There is now a whole-school commitment to want to improve. Senior leaders support us strongly but hold us to account closely.'
  - Many departments have taken the lead delivering training sessions to improve the quality of teaching. For example, humanities have led on providing activities to meet the individual needs of students, science and English have discussed the value of group work and PE have delivered training on questioning.
  - The curriculum is continuously under review and meets the needs, interests and aspirations of students well. There is a wide range of vocational programmes, many of which are taught in local colleges and other institutions, which are effective and in which students make good progress. The school also provides a variety of enrichment days, some of which are designed to improve students' employment prospects. It is too early to gauge the full impact of the school's strategies to foster students' literacy and numeracy skills in all the subjects they study.
  - Equality of opportunity is promoted soundly and the school rejects all forms of discrimination. Safeguarding and child protection procedures fully meet current requirements.
  - The local authority supports the school strongly and the school's membership of the Wigan Schools Improvement Consortium ensures that local schools play an active part in helping Lowton Church of England High to improve students' achievement, particularly in mathematics.
  - **The governance of the school:**
    - Members of the governing body are fully aware of the school's strengths and areas for development. They provide good support for the school and challenge the leadership with rigour. They monitor the impact of the spending of pupil premium funding closely. Governors oversee the school's strategies to improve the quality of teaching and they ensure that performance management arrangements are fair and that teachers are rewarded only for meeting their classroom targets.
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## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137783
<b>Local authority</b>	Wigan
<b>Inspection number</b>	400346

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	808
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Jennifer Farley
<b>Headteacher</b>	John Shanahan
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01942 767040
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