

Lowick Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School

30 Main Street, Lowick, Northumberland TD15 2UA

Inspection dates

4–5 June 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	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher leads the school with high expectations of what pupils can do. Since her appointment, she has improved the quality of the curriculum, teaching and pupils' outcomes.
- Many leaders are relatively new to their roles. They have accessed leadership training and senior leader support. They continue to develop their leadership skills effectively.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and plan work which challenges and inspires pupils. Teaching assistants support pupils skilfully.
- Current pupils are making good progress in writing but fewer pupils are working within the greater depths of learning in writing, compared to reading and mathematics. Pupils' spelling ability, presentation and accuracy of writing are not of a consistently high quality.
- The small proportion of disadvantaged pupils, and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive effective support. They make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and they conduct themselves well around school.
- Children get off to a good start in early years. They enjoy a stimulating learning environment and the quality of teaching is good. As a result, they are prepared well for Year 1.
- Leaders provide a challenging curriculum. There is a strong emphasis on learning outdoors and through educational visits.
- Leaders promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education and fundamental British values. Pupils have a good understanding of the school's Christian values. They are not as knowledgeable about the world religions, other than Christianity.
- Governors have been proactive to ensure that they are an effective governing body. They are proud of the actions they have taken to improve the school.
- Parents and carers recognise and welcome the rapid improvements in the school since the headteacher's appointment. Parents agree that the school is well led and managed.
- The proportion of pupils who are absent, or persistently absent, from school is worse than the national average. Holidays taken during term time contribute towards this.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils by:
 - continuing to improve pupils' progress in writing to increase the proportion of pupils working within greater depths of learning across the school, to match those of reading and mathematics.
 - ensuring that the presentation and accuracy of writing, including spelling, across all subjects, is of the highest quality.
- Improve pupils' attendance by:
 - ensuring that pupils attend school more regularly, including those who are persistently absent, so that attendance is at least in line with the national average
 - reducing the number of holidays pupils take during term time.
- Ensure that pupils develop a stronger understanding of different world faiths, other than Christianity, and religious groups in local, national and global societies.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Following the last inspection, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and outcomes for pupils, declined. Significant turbulence in leadership, including governance, over time, contributed to this decline in the quality of education. Since her appointment in April 2018, the headteacher has focused sharply on halting that decline. Highly effective leadership has ensured that the school is improving rapidly.
- The headteacher has built on the strengths of the school and has accurately identified the correct areas for improvement. She has ensured that all staff, many who were newly appointed, have opportunities to develop their leadership skills. Together, they have quickly forged a strong team with a united approach.
- Most leaders are recently appointed to their role. They are highly competent, enthusiastically driving forward new initiatives and ideas within the areas that they lead. Together as a strong leadership team, they check on the quality of education that is provided for the pupils. The headteacher has eradicated any weak teaching and effectively checks and evaluates the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved over the past year.
- Leaders have developed a curriculum which is creative and challenging for all. The curriculum is enriched through a wide range of educational experiences, visits and visitors. Pupils talked enthusiastically about outdoor learning experiences or visits to nearby castles or their re-enactment of the Viking invasion on Holy Island beach. Follow-up activities support pupils to develop their knowledge, enabling them to have a strong recall when they need to access this knowledge again.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and fundamental British values. Pupils talk confidently about the importance of rules, fairness, laws and democracy. They study different cultures for example when learning about India. However, the teaching of different world religions, other than Christianity, is not as successful. As a result, pupils lack secure knowledge of different world faiths and religious groups in local, national and global societies and are less confident to talk about what they know or have learned.
- The leadership of pupils with SEND has developed extremely well over the past year. The curriculum is adapted and fit for purpose to meet the needs and match the abilities of pupils with SEND. The very small proportion of pupils currently in school with SEND are making at least good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils are supported well. Leaders adapt the use of additional funding for the very small number of eligible pupils, in a bespoke way to meet their individual needs. Consequently, pupils make at least good, and sometimes exceptional, progress from their starting points.
- Leaders use the physical education (PE) and sports funding well. Pupils are encouraged to be more active through participating in physical activities such as the daily mile, gymnastics, rugby, multi-skills, tennis, cheerleading or tri-golf. Staff have developed

their skills in teaching PE through working alongside the sports coaches who share their expertise.

- The headteacher embraces partnership working with advisors from the local authority and the diocese. Advisors recognise the rapid improvements made, and the capacity for continuous improvement, since the headteacher's appointment. The headteacher has appreciated the external validation of statutory assessments so that leaders can be assured that their judgements, on the progress that pupils make, are accurate.
- All parents who completed the school's own questionnaires or spoke to the inspector, think that the school is well led and managed. One parent noted the rapid improvement under the leadership of the current headteacher, stating: 'The headteacher has placed a strong focus on improving standards. The school is stable now and my child is making good progress.'

Governance of the school

- Governors are a strength of the school. Following the previous inspection, governance went through some turbulent and challenging periods. As a result, there have been many changes to the governing body membership since the previous inspection. The chair of the governing body shares the headteacher's high expectations of staff and pupils. He has been instrumental in establishing and leading a now strong and determined governing body who are proud of the strong staff appointments they have made.
- Members of the governing body are proud to be a part of the school community. They receive training to ensure that they are up to date on their legal responsibilities. They have recently initiated a skills audit to make sure that, collectively, they have the right skills to be highly effective in their roles.
- Governors are not afraid to hold leaders to account. They ask challenging questions in meetings and share the same determination as the headteacher to raise standards across the school. Governors check frequently on how well any additional funding supports pupils' outcomes. They also check on pupils' attendance rate and they are aware that this is worse than the national average. They recognise that they need to check more regularly that the attendance policy provides relevant guidance to parents to discourage avoidable absences, for example taking holidays during term time.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff and governors have received relevant and up-to-date training relating to safeguarding. They understand and follow the procedures in place to report and record any concerns about children. The designated safeguarding lead takes prompt action, when necessary, to keep vulnerable children safe and arrange support where available.

- Appropriate checks are made when recruiting staff and for checking the suitability of any volunteers, supply staff or visitors to the school. Systems to record and update these checks are detailed and well managed.
- Pupils access a range of opportunities to learn how to keep themselves safe in different situations, including when online. All parents who completed the recent school questionnaire, or gave their views during the inspection, say that their children feel safe in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Since her appointment, the headteacher leads by example with a regular teaching commitment and high expectations. Following turbulence in staffing since the last inspection, new appointments have helped to stabilise and unite a strong staff team.
- Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They use questioning well to check pupils' understanding and to identify any misconceptions. Following the headteacher's lead, teachers have high expectations of pupil behaviour and what pupils can achieve by the end of each year group.
- Teaching assistants liaise effectively with teachers to support pupils. They have positive relationships with pupils and use questioning well to help encourage pupils to learn. Teaching assistants have recently accessed relevant training which has helped them to gain in confidence.
- The mathematics leader has changed the way that mathematics is taught. Joining a mathematics hub has enabled staff to access high-quality training which has improved their confidence and subject knowledge. Pupils have ample opportunities to discuss ideas, explain their answers, to reason and to develop a deep understanding of mathematics. This has improved the quality of teaching, leading to an improvement in pupils' achievement, particularly the proportion of pupils working at a higher standard.
- Pupils access high-quality reading texts which are matched to their reading abilities. Teachers build on the strong phonic knowledge that pupils acquire in Reception and Year 1. Pupils are taught how to develop their reading skills and are provided with opportunities to practise these skills across the curriculum. Teachers' high expectations of what pupils can achieve in reading has resulted in pupils being confident readers, having a wide repertoire of vocabulary and using a range of strategies in their reading.
- The English leader recently revised the teaching of writing. Pupils are taught how to write in a wide range of writing styles and contexts. They practise these skills by writing at length in other subjects across the curriculum. Pupils are taught specifically how to improve their English grammar, punctuation and spelling. However, teachers do not insist on the highest standards of presentation and accuracy of writing, including spelling, across all subjects. Although pupils' progress in writing has been strong across the school since September, very few pupils are working within the higher standard.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the school's Christian values of friendship, trust, forgiveness, tolerance and hope. Pupils talk with pride about the importance of their friendships and the school's golden rule of 'treating others as you would like to be treated yourself'.
- Pupil voice is an integral part of the school. Pupils have opportunities to take on board responsibilities such as school councillors or classroom monitors. They can also 'lead learning' within a lesson when they have an area of knowledge or expertise that they can share with their peers. Pupils have been instrumental in leading projects, for example campaigning to lower the speed limit on the road outside of the school or painting the village bus shelter. These activities allow pupils to grow in confidence and also develop their leadership skills.
- Pupils are taught to recognise the different forms that bullying can take. They are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online. The vast majority of pupils say that bullying is not a problem, but if it did occur, adults would deal with it quickly.
- Pupils enjoy the wide range of sports and physical activities that are part of the curriculum. They demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of staying fit and healthy and how eating healthy foods support this.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' conduct around school, at breaktimes, in corridors and the dining hall is good. Pupils have positive attitudes towards each other and are well mannered. Generally, pupils work together cooperatively in lessons and are confident to discuss their learning with each other and adults.
- Pupils say that on occasion some of their friends can be 'a little bit silly' but adults remind pupils of how they should behave. However, pupils say that behaviour has improved over the past year since the introduction of the school behaviour reward system. Pupils say that it is effective because they are motivated to collect the good behaviour points they gain, to save for a larger prize or to share prizes with friends. Behaviour logs show that there are very few behaviour incidents to record and no exclusions over time.
- Leaders have procedures in place to follow up any absences promptly to check that pupils are safe. The proportion of pupils who are absent from school, including those who are persistently absent, is worse than the national average. Parents who take their children on holiday during term time contribute to this. In some cases, there are pupils with exceptional circumstances who have taken time off for medical reasons. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school has improved over this academic year but is still higher than average.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The number of pupils in the cohorts of published outcomes is often too few to make meaningful comparisons with national performance information. Overall, however, pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- In the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1, all pupils have reached the expected standard over the past three years. All current pupils in Year 1 are on track to meet the expected standard in 2019. This high attainment over time is due to phonics being taught effectively and pupils applying their phonics skills to read and write words.
- In 2018, all pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1. However, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standards was more variable. No pupils attained the higher standard in writing.
- The school's current assessment information shows that the pupils are making good progress across each year group in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' work in books validates this. A higher proportion of pupils are working within the greater depths of learning in reading and mathematics across each year group than in writing.
- Too few pupils in every year group exceed the expectations for their age in writing. Work in pupils' writing books show that pupils are given opportunities to recount their experiences from the enriching curriculum. They write with ambitious vocabulary and adapt their word choice to suit the purpose and audience. Over the academic year, pupils have developed their stamina for writing, producing extended pieces of writing across a range of curriculum subjects. However, pupils' books show that pupils do not apply spelling patterns as well as they should. Their handwriting is sometimes untidy and on occasion, pupils do not present their work neatly.
- There are very few pupils with SEND or who are disadvantaged in the school. Current pupils receive appropriate support within their lessons and, as a result, they make good and sometimes exceptional progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils in lower key stage 2 build on the outcomes they attain at the end of key stage 1. Leaders regularly evaluate what pupils will need to learn in lower key stage so that pupils are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills when transferring to middle school. For example, work in lessons and in books showed that pupils are developing a secure understanding of the rules of English grammar and developing reasoning skills in mathematics. This focused work is ensuring that pupils are ready for the next stage of their education.

Early years provision

Good

- The Nursery and Reception classes are led efficiently by two members of staff. Together, they have a shared understanding and evaluation of the quality of teaching and the progress made by children across the early years.
- Most children enter the early years with skills, knowledge and understanding which is typical for their age. From this point, children settle well and get off to a good start to their education. They make good progress because of a wide range of stimulating and

challenging learning opportunities that match the interests and needs of the children. By the end of Reception, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is above average.

- Teaching across the early years is good. The leader new to early years this academic year has liaised with advisors from the local authority to further develop how staff plan learning opportunities both indoors and for outdoor learning. Children are able to be curious, manage risks, investigate and explore because the planning, activities and resources enable them to do so in a safe yet stimulating environment.
- During their time in early years, children make good progress in all areas of learning. They develop their basic skills well. Almost all children are currently on track to reach the expected standard in reading, writing and number. This means that children are well prepared for Year 1. However, too few children are on track to exceed the expected standard in writing. Work in children's writing books show that on occasion, the presentation of writing, and formation of letters, is untidy.
- Staff have recently adapted the learning environment to be suitable for a small number of children who are two years old. Although no children in this age group attended Nursery during the inspection, the children's records of achievements show that children access interesting and age-appropriate activities.
- Children's phonic knowledge is strong. They apply the sounds they learn when spelling words. They enjoy reading and teachers use books as starting points, planning inspiring and practical activities relating to stories.
- Staff carry out risk assessments daily and ensure that the early years welfare requirements are met. Children have positive attitudes to learning and are self-confident. Children behave well and play harmoniously together.
- Parents of children in the early years, who shared their views during the inspection, were overwhelmingly positive about the school, the staff and the progress their children are making. Parents appreciate that they can be involved in their children's learning for example by attending 'stay and play' sessions. One parent commented: 'My child is really settled because staff care about the children. I don't think my child would be as happy in any other school.'

School details

Unique reference number	131221
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10087663

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	2 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robert O'Rourke
Headteacher	Rebecca Simpson
Telephone number	01289 388268
Website	www.lowickholylislandschools.org.uk
Email address	Admin@lowick.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–16 June 2010

Information about this school

- This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.
- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed. There have been significant changes to the staffing team.
- Lowick Church of England First School is a much smaller than average-sized school. The school is federated with a very small school on Holy Island (Lindisfarne).
- The headteacher is the headteacher of both Lowick Church of England First School and Holy Island Church of England First School.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium is well below average.

- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below average.
- The school runs a before- and after-school club for its pupils.
- Since the last inspection the school has introduced provision for two-year-olds.
- Children attend the Nursery on a part-time basis and attend full time from Reception.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in all year groups. These observations were carried out with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, middle leaders, staff, members of the governing body, the school improvement partner from the local authority and the assistant director of the diocese.
- The inspector listened to several pupils read, scrutinised pupils' work across a range of subjects and talked with pupils during lesson observations. The views of pupils were considered during formal and informal discussions.
- The lead inspector observed behaviour at breaktime and in the dining hall at lunchtime.
- The inspector talked with parents during the inspection and considered views expressed by 12 parents in the school's most recent questionnaire. Staff gave their views in a face-to-face meeting.
- A range of documents was reviewed, including the school's development plan, summary of the school's self-evaluation and the single central record for employment checks. The inspector also scrutinised the pupil premium strategy, sports premium documents, information relating to pupils' attendance, attainment and progress, behaviour and exclusion logs, governing body meeting minutes and reports from the school improvement partner.

Inspection team

Alison Aitchison, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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