

Larwood School

Webb Rise, Stevenage, SG1 5QU

Inspection dates 16–17 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The strong leadership of the headteacher, other leaders and managers, and the governing body has led to good improvement since the last inspection.
- Leaders have concentrated on improving the quality of teaching in order to raise pupils' achievement. They have also improved systems for managing pupils' behaviour so that it better supports their learning.
- Teaching is now good, and pupils are making good progress and reaching higher standards than in previous years.
- Behaviour is good and the school makes sure that pupils feel safe. Good behaviour is rewarded in ways that motivate pupils and the number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen.
- The school meets with a good level of success in transforming pupils' attitudes to learning. This contributes a great deal to the progress that they make and helps to turn their lives around.
- The varied learning activities support pupils' good personal development as well as their academic achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough pupils make rapid progress for achievement to be outstanding, though progress is now good.
- Teachers do not all provide pupils with enough guidance on how to produce good quality writing.
- Very occasionally, teachers set work in mathematics that does not build effectively on what pupils can already do.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 14 lessons, all jointly with the headteacher or a deputy headteacher. She also made short visits to five other lessons and observed an assembly.
- Meetings were held with leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, and with a group of pupils. A telephone discussion took place with a representative of the local authority.
- As there were too few responses to the online survey (Parent View), the inspector spoke to a small number of parents over the telephone and took into account the written views provided by a small minority of parents.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation records and its checks on teachers' work, records of pupils' progress and their behaviour, and samples of pupils' work.

Inspection team

Margaret Goodchild, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Larwood is a special school for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. There are more boys than girls but there has been an increase in the proportion of girls since the previous inspection.
- Many pupils join the school during Key Stage 2 and there are more pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 than in other year groups. Of the pupils currently on roll, over half have been in the school for only just over a term.
- Most pupils are White British and the percentage of pupils who speak English as an additional language is low.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding, as they are known to be eligible for free school meals, is above average.
- A small number of older pupils attend North Herts College for a session each week where they take part in vocational 'taster' courses.
- The headteacher took up post in September 2012, just after the last inspection. Four class teachers have joined the school since that time.
- The school makes residential provision for up to 24 pupils, who board for part of the week, but this aspect of the school's work did not form part of this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement by increasing the proportion of pupils who make rapid progress in English and mathematics.
- Make sure that teaching is always at least good and increase the amount that is outstanding by:
 - consistently providing clear guidance and examples to pupils of how to produce high quality writing
 - always using information about what pupils can already do to match work in mathematics to the next steps in their learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Many pupils join the school with low attainment, having had spells of time out of education between the end of Key Stage 1 and being awarded a place at Larwood. They generally start school with negative attitudes to learning and many have gaps in their skills, knowledge and understanding.
- The fact that most pupils join the school well into Key Stage 2 means that published information about their progress from the end of Key Stage 1 to the end of Key Stage 2 does not give a full picture of how well they achieve at the school.
- While the progress of pupils who left the school over the last two years required improvement, especially in mathematics, school data and inspection findings show that pupils currently in the school are making good progress, including girls and boys, pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language. Attainment is rising and more pupils are on track to reach broadly average standards by the end of the current Year 6 than in previous years.
- The school's focus on raising achievement in mathematics is proving successful and pupils are now making similar progress in literacy, numeracy and communication. Nearly all pupils currently in the school have made at least the expected amount of progress each term in English and mathematics and some are doing better than this. There are examples of individual pupils making outstanding progress, but not enough for overall progress to be rapid or achievement to be outstanding.
- The organisation of pupils into ability groups for English and mathematics means that more-able pupils usually receive a good level of challenge in the work that teachers set. Furthermore, the school provides sessions for the most-able pupils in Years 5 and 6 who need a greater level of challenge in mathematics. These pupils are making good progress and working towards National Curriculum Levels 5 or 6.
- Pupils have good opportunities to develop a range of skills, including through attending vocational taster sessions at North Herts College and working with visiting artists and musicians as part of the Trinity Guildhall Bronze Arts Award. These stimulating activities contribute to pupils' positive attitudes to learning and to their overall achievement.
- Pupils make good progress in developing their physical and sporting skills. Outdoor education contributes considerably to this and those pupils who successfully complete this course have the opportunity to climb Snowdon at the end of the school year.
- In 2013, pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding made less progress than their classmates, performing about two terms behind the rest of the class in reading and mathematics and a year behind in writing. Currently, pupils supported through the pupil premium are making as much progress as other pupils because the school is carefully tracking their progress and adjusting support where necessary to meet their needs.
- Pupils usually make good progress in lessons throughout the school, and their books show that they generally cover a good amount of work in English and mathematics. The best written work occurs where pupils redraft and word-process their writing, or where the teacher has given them a clear structure within which to record their ideas. Some pupils meet with less success when asked to write a story or a letter without first being given some means of structuring what

they want to say.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now good at both key stages, including in English and mathematics. A small amount of teaching still requires improvement but there is also some that is outstanding.
- Teachers have good relationships with their pupils, classrooms are made attractive with displays and lessons are purposeful. Activities are often chosen to stimulate pupils' interests as well as developing their skills, and teaching assistants are generally used well to support pupils' learning. These factors all contribute to pupils' good enjoyment of, and enthusiasm for, learning.
- Teachers carefully assess pupils when they join the school, including part of the way through a key stage, to find out what they can already do, and regularly record their progress. In many lessons, teachers question pupils well to check their understanding and deepen their thinking.
- Pupils have regular reading and spelling tasks for homework, and the teaching of reading is good throughout the school. Teachers provide pupils with plenty of opportunity to practise their reading in class and in an outstanding English lesson in Years 2 and 3, the teacher supported pupils very skilfully as they drew on their knowledge of sounds and letters to label diagrams of what they see on their way to school.
- There has been a marked improvement in the teaching of mathematics, and teachers are now more confident about what to teach and how to teach it. In a good mathematics lesson in Years 5 and 6, the teacher made learning exciting by getting pupils to apply their knowledge of decimals to the topic of shopping for toys. In another good mathematics lesson, more-able pupils were challenged to explain their calculations and justify their answers to a series of questions that required them to apply their knowledge of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.
- In some lessons, the teaching of writing is good. For example, in a lesson in Years 3 and 4, the teacher discussed the writing of a rhyming poem with the whole class. She gave them a planning sheet where they jotted down words they wanted to use in their poems and then displayed the best ones on the board. After further planning, pupils were shown an imaginative poem to help stimulate their own writing.
- At times, teachers do not provide pupils with enough information about how to approach a piece of writing, or make them aware of what a good piece of writing would look like. This lack of guidance results in pupils producing some written work that is shorter and, for example, uses a narrower range of vocabulary than might otherwise be the case.
- In most mathematics lessons, work set takes good account of what pupils already know and the organisation of pupils into sets for English and mathematics has assisted teachers in matching work to the next steps in learning for different groups, including for more-able pupils. Very occasionally, teachers do not use what they know about pupils' existing skills and so set some tasks that do not challenge their class enough.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- As a result of improved systems for managing pupils' behaviour and rewarding those who try

hard, the behaviour of pupils is good. Parents praise the way staff have turned around their children's attitudes to learning and transformed their behaviour, contributing to positive changes at home as well as in school.

- The school is calm and orderly and pupils come to lessons ready to learn. They generally follow instructions well, concentrate and take pride in their achievement. In the best lessons, pupils are enthusiastic and talk excitedly about what they have been learning.
- The school has a range of rewards that the pupils value and respect. In particular, the right to wear a black shirt in Years 5 and 6 or a blue shirt lower down the school is prized because it brings privileges for pupils who have shown that they are able to take responsibility for their own behaviour.
- The school provides good support to pupils who need extra help to deal with their behaviour and emotions, including through use of the family liaison worker and special support programmes. The introduction of internal exclusion through use of 'magnolia room', where pupils work under close supervision, has enabled the school to reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions and there has also been a reduction in the number of physical restraints.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel safe in school and learn about how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. Parents spoken to during the inspection expressed confidence in the way the school keeps their children safe and cares for them.
- Pupils know about different types of bullying and say that although some bullying occurs, mostly name calling, the school has good systems for dealing with it. Pupils get on well together and work harmoniously in pairs and groups in lessons. Lunchtimes are happy, family-based occasions where pupils and staff eat together and pupils learn valuable social skills.
- The rate of attendance is above that nationally for special schools and reflects pupils' positive attitudes to learning and enjoyment of school. The school provides good support to help pupils quickly settle in when they join the school during a key stage.
- There is a small amount of challenging behaviour on occasion, reflecting the nature of pupils' difficulties, but this is managed skilfully by staff and is not allowed to get in the way of other pupils' learning.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides good leadership for the school. He has successfully communicated his high expectations to staff and pupils, and established a strong learning culture. The school has made good improvement since the previous inspection, and leaders have a clear understanding of how to improve the school further as well as the determination to do so.
- There has been a great deal of work done to improve the quality of teaching, raise pupils' achievement and reduce the impact of any inappropriate behaviour on their progress. Regular checks on teachers' work and meetings to discuss pupils' progress mean that teachers are held to account for the effect their work has on pupils' achievement.
- Senior leaders closely analyse data to make sure all pupils are making as much progress as they should and, where necessary, adjust the support provided to give all pupils equal opportunities and to avoid any possible discrimination. Teamwork between leaders, managers, teachers and

teaching assistants is strong.

- Training for teachers has contributed to an increase in their skills, particularly in the teaching of mathematics. Staff with responsibility for particular aspects of the school's work, including for English and mathematics, make a good contribution to school improvement.
 - The programmes of work meet pupils' academic and personal needs well. They place emphasis on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills but also provide a wide range of interesting activities that broaden pupils' horizons and contribute to their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Learning is enriched by many trips out and visitors into the school, and there are now higher expectations for the contribution the 24-hour curriculum makes for pupils who are in residence for part of the week.
 - The school already provides a wealth of physical opportunities for pupils and meets with success in competitive sports alongside other schools. It is making good use of the primary school sport funding to extend the range of activities on offer and to provide further coaching for pupils to promote healthy lifestyles, enhance their physical well-being and improve their performance.
 - The school works closely with other special and mainstream schools and with the local community. It works well in partnership with parents and those who expressed their views about the school are highly delighted with the way it has helped their children.
 - The local authority provides good support for the school and has an accurate view of its effectiveness. In particular, it has helped leaders in improving the quality of teaching and in developing the learning environment.
- **The governance of the school:**
- The governing body is knowledgeable about the school and has high expectations for its future development. Governors see their role as setting a positive atmosphere for learning and making sure pupils get the best possible education. They are aware of how far the school has come in the journey towards achieving this. They appointed the current headteacher with the clear intention of increasing the school's focus on academic progress as well as strengthening the management of behaviour.
 - The governing body asks challenging questions of school leaders and seeks out detailed information, for example, about what has enabled pupils to make good progress or what might be holding a particular pupil back. Teamwork between governors and leaders is strong and governors collect information for themselves, including through regular visits to the school. This contributes to their awareness of the quality of teaching, and they are clear that only the most effective teachers are rewarded, and they work with leaders to identify how less effective teaching can be improved. Governors know how pupil premium funding is spent and check on the impact it is having on the progress of pupils for whom it is intended. They fulfil their statutory responsibilities well and make sure the school meets requirements in the way it safeguards pupils.

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

Unique reference number	131503
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	430760

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	57
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sandra Barr
Headteacher	Sean Trimble
Date of previous school inspection	12 July 2012
Telephone number	01438 236333
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