

Inspection of a good school: Larwood School

Webb Rise, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG1 5QU

Inspection dates:

9–10 October 2019

Outcome

Larwood School continues to be a good school.

There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a section 5 inspection now.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at this school. They learn in a stimulating environment, where adults deliver a curriculum that is exciting and helps pupils learn well. Pupils' needs are often met through carefully planned activities from specialist teachers. Staff organise learning to get the very best from pupils.

Pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs are very well met. Pupils have positive and trusting relationships with staff. Staff take every opportunity to celebrate pupils' successes in learning and personal development.

Pupils have many opportunities for making choices and building self-confidence. They are rewarded for their hard work. From a daily warm welcome, pupils can flow into 'singing and dancing assembly'. Good humour is very much a feature of the school day. Adults plan trips and visits as an essential part of the wider curriculum. For example, pupils really enjoyed their visit to the zoo in the first week of term to begin their new topic. Pupils flourish at Larwood and are 'wired for learning'.

Leaders enable every pupil to return to a regular pattern of school attendance and lessons. When they leave Larwood school, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. This can be in a mainstream or in another special school.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have organised an exciting and innovative curriculum which sparks pupils' interest in learning. This is not accidental. Leaders ensure that pupils' needs are carefully met through highly trained and skilled staff together with a thoughtfully designed curriculum.

All staff are aspirational, with a strong desire for pupils to achieve. They spend time seeking ways for pupils to make even better progress. Teachers appropriately check on

the progress that pupils make. They then use this information well to build further on pupils' knowledge and skills during lessons. This is well established in English and mathematics and is developing in other subjects.

Pupils can often start with gaps in their learning due to previous disruption in their educational experience. Adults work hard to identify the essential key skills that are missing, especially in English, reading and mathematics. Pupils and their families recognise the progress individuals make in these subjects during their time at Larwood School.

One pupil, echoing the views of many, explained, 'I didn't used to be able to read but now I can.' Pupils benefit from highly specialised teaching in phonics lessons. Leaders recognise how important it is for every child to read accurately, fluently and with comprehension every day. Pupils avidly read suitably chosen books to improve their reading skills both in school and at home. However, some pupils start at school at different ages and stages. The same structured and deliberate approach to teaching of early reading needs to be fully implemented for pupils of any age coming into Larwood School.

Teachers provide pupils with a wide range of work in mathematics to help pupils build the necessary basic knowledge and skills. Teachers identify any gaps in pupils' understanding and plan for effective ways to further support pupils. Pupils are making good progress in mathematics.

Leaders provide high-quality training for staff. Staff are positive about the support they receive from leaders. They consider that adult workloads are taken into account by school leaders. Leaders provide both subject-specific training for staff and also training to develop pupils' emotional and mental health. At times, pupils relate their learning to individual staff rather than the curriculum with which they are provided.

Leaders set high standards for pupils' behaviour. They provide staff with relevant training so that everyone is skilled and knows how to address behaviour issues. Expert knowledge of behaviour is a cornerstone of the schools' success. Since the start of this school year, there has been no need to use physical intervention to manage challenging behaviour. Exclusions are very rare.

The vast majority of pupils start at Larwood full time. Pupils have a well-constructed day, with many different activities to complete once they have finished their classwork. Pupils enjoy these additional times and the activities which they complete on their own. Pupils are never at a loose end. Pupils are proud of their school and attend well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All policies and procedures are fully in place. Staff understand their role in raising concerns immediately for this vulnerable group of pupils. Leaders respond immediately to the concerns raised and act quickly to keep the school community safe.

The school has invested in expanding the safeguarding team. This provides early help to families. This child-centred approach builds trusting relationships throughout the school and wider community.

Leaders at Larwood are not afraid to argue for the care and support their pupils and families need.

Pupils say they feel safe. Bullying is not tolerated. Pupils are surprised to talk about bullying because it is so rare.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- When pupils join the school, they get off to a flying start in early reading, as there is a coherent approach to the teaching of phonics. Leaders must continue to ensure that, wherever possible, all pupils of all ages learn to read accurately, fluently and with comprehension.
- Leaders communicate clear intention for what they want pupils to learn and achieve. Teachers understand leaders' views and adjust their practice to deliver a well-constructed curriculum. This is well established in English and mathematics. Leaders need to ensure that the same standard of coherently designed curriculum and implementation is fully achieved in every subject.
- Leaders develop teachers' subject knowledge across the curriculum subjects. There is also training for others to develop specialist knowledge relating to the social, emotional and mental health issues of the pupils. One teacher shared that they were developing their professional skills with a postgraduate degree, paid for by the school. Leaders need to ensure that this wide range of training leads to consistently high standards across every aspect of the school's work.

Background

When we have judged a special school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Larwood School, to be good on 17 January 2014. Larwood School which is now part of Larwood Academy Trust has not previously been inspected.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	143604
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10110255
Type of school	Academy
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Not applicable
Number of pupils on the school roll	80
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	Not applicable
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Sandra Barr
Headteacher	Sean Trimble
Website	www.larwood.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Larwood School is part of Larwood Academy Trust.
- The school opened in October 2015.
- The school is a specialist provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The school covers pupils aged 5–11 arranged into small classes.
- There are three specialist resource bases: Cub, Fox and Space Hub.
- All pupils at Larwood have education, health and care plans.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- Most pupils attend Larwood for two years.

Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, subject leads and a group of staff.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with the headteacher of the next provision, two members of the local governing board and the trust's school improvement partner.
- Reading, mathematics, English, physical education and personal, social and health education were specifically considered as part of this inspection.
- Inspectors visited several lessons with the headteacher and senior leaders.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils to talk about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work over time.
- The lead inspector listened to a group of pupils read and talked to them about their reading books.
- The inspectors examined a range of documents, including school leaders' self-evaluation, improvement planning, the head's monitoring documents and documents related to pupils' safety.
- The single central record was checked to ensure that recruitment and vetting procedures are thorough.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils formally and informally during their breaktimes and in class.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the survey for staff.
- Inspectors spoke with parents as they brought their children to school in the morning.
- The lead inspector also considered the responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View.

Inspection team

Fyfe Johnston, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Helen Bailey

Ofsted Inspector

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