

Larwood School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	131503
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	385874
Inspection dates	12–13 July 2012
Lead inspector	Janet Thompson HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	53
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sandra Barr
Headteacher	Alan Whitaker
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2011
School address	Webb Rise Stevenage SG1 5QU
Telephone number	01438 236333
Fax number	01438 236363
Email address	head@larwood.herts.sch.uk

Residential provision	Larwood School
Social care unique reference number	SC056394
Social care inspector	Gwen Buckley

Age group	5–11
Inspection date(s)	12–13 July 2012
Inspection number	385874



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Introduction

Inspection team

Janet Thompson

Her Majesty's Inspector

Joan McPhail

Additional Inspector

Gwen Buckley

Social Care Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 12 lessons or parts of lessons taught by 8 teachers and looked at pupils' work. They also observed lunch time, play time, assembly, a rehearsal for a gymnastics display and residential times. Inspectors held meetings with groups of pupils, staff, parents and carers, a representative from the local authority, the independent visitor for pupils accessing the residential provision, the Vice Chair of the Governing Body and the governor responsible for residential provision. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at various documentation including safeguarding policies, the school self-evaluation and development planning, tracking of pupils' progress and some detailed case studies. Inspectors also reviewed pupil questionnaires, staff questionnaires and the 21 parental questionnaires received.

Information about the school

Larwood is a maintained residential special school for pupils who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Nearly half have additional needs such as autistic spectrum disorder. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Nearly all the pupils at the school are boys. The school can provide up to 25 residential places. At the time of the inspection 16 boys were accessing part-time residential provision. Many pupils join or leave the school at times other than at the start of a key stage or year group. Most pupils stay until secondary transfer although a few pupils return to mainstream school each year. A much larger proportion of the school population is in Years 4, 5 and 6 than in younger age groups. Most pupils are White British and the percentage of pupils who speak English as an additional language is low. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The school has achieved a number of awards including the Active Sports mark. At the last inspection the school was found to require significant improvement and was given a notice to improve.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- Larwood is a satisfactory residential special school. It is not yet good because, although learning is improving, most pupils make satisfactory progress. Pupils' behaviour is also improving but they remain too reliant on direction from staff. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- The progress pupils make is variable from below expected rates for some pupils to above for others. Pupils commonly join the school working at levels lower than those expected for their age. A few make accelerated progress and some achieve expected levels by the time they leave. Progress in mathematics is not as strong as in English because pupils join the school with gaps in their mathematical knowledge that are not being closed quickly enough.
- Teaching is satisfactory. Some teachers provide consistent challenge so that pupils learn well, but others do not ensure they plan work to challenge the different abilities of pupils within individual lessons or over time.
- Behaviour and safety are satisfactory. Parents and carers believe their children feel safe at the school. Pupils have a strong sense of belonging and develop an appreciation of the achievements of others. Behaviour management has improved considerably since the last inspection but there is still some inconsistency and pupils remain highly reliant on adult-led structures.
- There are good outcomes for residential pupils especially in developing independence skills and improving their behaviour. The residential provision is satisfactory as policies are not updated to reflect best practice.
- Leaders monitor practice more rigorously than at the last inspection and have

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taken effective steps to improve pupils' behaviour and progress. More suitable responses to pupils' behaviour and more effective performance management is helping to improve teaching and learning. Information from monitoring is not always brought together to inform comprehensive evaluation and ensure all policy and practice is effective. The curriculum is good and promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of pupils making above expected progress, especially in mathematics in Key Stage 2, by ensuring all teachers:
 - have high expectations within lessons and for pupils' work over time
 - use assessment accurately to match work to the pupils' ability and current level of learning
 - provide more active problem-solving and investigative opportunities within lessons.
- Enable more pupils to take on greater responsibility for managing their own behaviour in a range of situations.
- Use the information from monitoring across activities more rigorously to challenge the effectiveness of different policy and practice and take swift action as a result.
- Refine policies so that they reflect best practice within the national minimum standards for residential special schools by:
 - updating the school's written protocol for children who are missing to include children who are looked after so that it is fully in line with best practice identified in the statutory guidance *Children who run away and go missing from home and care* (July 2009)
 - further developing the fire risk assessment to include information on the use of personal emergency evacuation plans to ensure anyone requiring assistance is able to leave the building safely (NMS 16 and 7).
 - further developing the medication administration policy to reflect the good practice expectation of the use of a controlled drug register (NMS 3).

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' progress varies considerably in part due to the variation in expectations and challenge from different teachers. Pupils arrive at the school usually working at levels lower than those expected for their age, often due to disrupted education and sometimes due to additional special educational needs. A small proportion of the

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pupils make enough progress to gain levels expected for their age by the time they leave. Careful analysis of different groups of pupils shows there is no one group doing better than others apart from those who attend for more than two years, most of whom make more progress. There are, however, a small minority who have attended school for more than two years who have not made expected progress.

Parents and carers are pleased with the progress their children make, particularly in the way in which they engage in education as, for many, this has previously been a struggle. Across the school, progress made in English has increased over the last year as a result of improved support for teachers and this is evident in the pupils' most recent writing. Progress made in mathematics in Key Stage 2 is lagging behind English and pupils' work shows that gaps in their learning are not being closed quickly enough. Year 6 pupils have made good progress to gain their arts awards reflecting their enthusiasm for the arts. During lessons the progress pupils make depends heavily on how well teachers adapt work to address the range of different levels pupils are working at in their group. Too often all pupils are expected to complete the same activity, even though they are working at very different levels. There are not always enough opportunities to solve problems and find things out for themselves.

Regular opportunities for reading have helped pupils make satisfactory or good progress but some of the strategies including phonics (the sounds that letters make) are not being used consistently. Additional interventions, including residential provision, are helping pupils address gaps in learning that many have due to disrupted education prior to attending Larwood. This is beginning to help more pupils make better progress, particularly in English, although the strategies used during the interventions are not always transferred into day-to-day classroom practice.

Quality of teaching

Teaching varies in quality across the school. There are examples of good teaching. In these lessons teachers use detailed assessment to plan and adapt work to ensure there is sufficient challenge for every pupil in the group. In one lesson observed the teacher carefully adapted her questions to make sure every pupil could respond at different levels. She gave them opportunities to develop their thinking and help them improve their communication skills so that they could explain their thoughts and ideas. In another lesson pupils were working effectively in well-planned pairs so that they could support each other's ideas.

In some weaker lessons the same and often mundane activity was given to all pupils and this did not provide sufficient challenge or engage pupils in being able to explain their thinking or develop ideas. At times there is a lack of structured and supportive materials to help pupils investigate ideas and problems for themselves. Teachers' marking also reveals differences in their expectations of the amount and the quality of pupils' work that is considered acceptable. The majority of parents and carers believe their children are well taught and this is the case in some but not all lessons. Relationships are positive between staff and pupils and there is often good promotion of moral and cultural development. Pupils are encouraged to understand different

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views of the same situations and are introduced to a good range of different cultures and experiences. Pupils have mixed views about teaching that reflect the variations in quality and expectations and their responses identify differences across lessons. When pupils are given good levels of challenge alongside clear structures and expectations for behaviour they are engaged and motivated to work hard.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils make at least reasonable progress in improving their behaviour and some make good progress. Tight structures help pupils to understand the expectations of behaviour but these are very adult-led. Even those pupils who make rapid progress are not given many opportunities to take on responsibility and learn to manage their own behaviour. The very good cooperative team work demonstrated during a gymnastics display shows that pupils are capable of doing this. The improvements since the last inspection have been considerable, incidents have halved and there are fewer exclusions. There is better behaviour management using a range of low-level interventions although some inconsistency remains. Individual management plans do not always make it clear how pupils will know what behaviours they need to improve and how they will help themselves do this.

Parents and carers recognise that lessons are sometimes disrupted but individual comments about their own child's behaviour reflect the great appreciation they have for the school and how staff help their child to behave more appropriately and stay safe. Most pupils feel safe in school most of the time. They recognise that although there is some swearing and name calling staff take quick action to stop this. They do not think all staff deal with bad language and name calling as well as others but know, for example, that using racist words is not tolerated. Nearly all of them believe bullying is dealt with well by staff and inspectors found the infrequent bullying incidents to be recorded and followed up effectively. Residential pupils are well supported to improve their behaviour in a variety of situations. The liaison between residential and school staff is good. There was a very good example observed of a class teacher working closely with residential staff to support a young pupil who was anxious about going to 'Laserzone'. He was reassured by staff carefully explaining his options and, as a result, he did join in with the activity and thoroughly enjoyed it. The curriculum is well taught to help pupils understand how to stay safe with some good examples of all the Year 6 pupils gaining 'Bikeability' awards and Key Stage 1 gaining road safety awareness. One pupil explained how to 'cross the road and be alive' to all the pupils in assembly.

Leadership and management

The improvements made at the school, including the residential provision, over the last year show that actions taken in response to better monitoring are helping to increase the consistency of behaviour management as well as improve teaching and care. This, in turn, is supporting pupils to behave better and achieve more. The more precise support for developing the quality of teaching is beginning to show improvement through the progress made by pupils in the latter part of the year.

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Expectations are higher and the extra interventions for individual pupils are more carefully targeted so that pupils have an equal opportunity to succeed.

The leadership team, including the governing body, has responded well to the support offered by the local authority and there is a more rigorous routine of monitoring and challenge as a result. Safeguarding meets requirements across the school and residential provision. There are specific strengths in how the school works with pupils' families and carers to support and ensure pupils can succeed at school and at home. Many of the systems for increasing accountability and ensuring consistency are relatively new but are already effective in establishing improved progress for the pupils in some areas. There are still aspects of the curriculum that are not as well taught as others, for example mathematics, and this is highlighted in the school's improvement plan.

The curriculum is good because it provides a wide range of experiences that are adapted to meet individual needs. It offers a framework within which cultural and spiritual development are developed well. There are specific strengths in the outdoor activities including 'wild camping' and additional opportunities for pupils provided through the arts award. Improvements in behaviour management have increased the opportunities for all pupils to undertake these activities leading to greater equality.

Residential provision

The residential provision is satisfactory. The quality of provision and care are satisfactory because, although they are well adapted to meet the pupils' individual needs, some policies and procedures do not reflect good practice. The outcomes for the pupils are good partly because of the significant influence of the trusting relationships between staff and pupils alongside the close work with parents and carers. Good behaviour and achievement are regularly praised and rewarded. Pupils who frequently achieve top scores are proud to be moved off the system as it means they are able to manage their behaviour without this incentive. There is also considerable success in helping pupils to become more independent and take on responsibilities according to their understanding and ability. This develops their self esteem and confidence and prepares them for moving on.

Pupils feel safe within the residential provision. They like the provision and could not provide any suggestions on how it could be improved. The residential provision is flexible to ensure pupils can maintain links with their home community. Part time residential provision is an effective intervention to help pupils succeed at school and the liaison amongst staff is good. Staff in all roles feel part of the whole school community. Pupils are encouraged to lead a healthy lifestyle taking regular exercise and eating a healthy diet. They are encouraged to make positive choices and look after themselves.

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The stable staff team helps pupils settle quickly and offers continuity of care. Robust staff recruitment arrangements are in place. New and existing staff receive a good level of training appropriate to their roles. Staff have a good understanding of how to manage any child protection concerns and take appropriate action. This helps to protect pupils.

Fire drills and arrangements for emergency evacuation meet requirements. A very recent fire risk assessment has highlighted a number of areas for the school to address, such as installing some new signs and replacing others. The school fire safety protocols do not include reference to the use of personal emergency evacuation plans if needed. Procedures for staff to follow should a pupil go missing do not fully reflect the most recent guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care. Staff are trained in giving and recording medication but do not consistently use best practice when administering medication and the policy does not include the use of a controlled drug register. This guidance is being updated.

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

These are the grades for the residential provision

Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	3
Outcomes for residential pupils	2
Quality of residential provision and care	3
Residential pupils' safety	3
Leadership and management of the residential provision	3

Glossary

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.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons, and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



16 July 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Larwood School, Stevenage, SG1 5QU

Thank you for welcoming us when we inspected your school.

- Larwood is a satisfactory school where you make adequate progress and some of you make good progress.
- Many of you told us that you enjoy coming to school and that you feel safe because staff take action when pupils are not supportive of each other.
- The school is not yet good because some teachers do not always make sure they give you work that you understand or that makes you think hard so that you can all make good progress.
- You told us that you find some lessons, but not all, interesting and I have asked that you are given more opportunities to investigate your own ideas and work out some problems for yourselves. You can help teachers by being as cooperative in other lessons as you are when doing gymnastics or 'wild camping'.
- Many of you have found behaving appropriately in a range of situations difficult. The school and residential staff successfully help you improve your behaviour. I have asked that you are given more to opportunities to manage your own behaviour and take on greater responsibility throughout the school, as some of you do in the residential provision. I hope you will rise to this challenge.
- The staff at the school have made many changes over the last year to help improve the progress you are making and help you to improve your behaviour more quickly. I have asked that they continue with this work and check carefully that it is helping.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Janet Thompson
Her Majesty's Inspector

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