

Lever Park School

Stocks Park Drive, Horwich, Bolton, Lancashire BL6 6DE

Inspection dates

15–16 March 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good. Work set by teachers is not challenging enough for the most-able pupils.
- Pupils do not make consistently good progress in a wide range of subjects. Not enough pupils make the progress expected of them in mathematics.
- Expectations of the most-able pupils are too low. The most-able pupils do not make fast enough progress, especially in mathematics.
- Attendance is below the national average for secondary schools. Persistent absence is high.
- The school's personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) programme is not effective enough to support some areas of pupils' personal development.
- Leaders' checks on teaching quality do not focus sharply enough on the impact of teachers' work on pupils' learning and progress.

The school has the following strengths

- The interim executive headteacher and senior leaders have tackled the significant weaknesses identified at the school's last inspection and are demonstrating strong capacity to secure further improvement.
- The interim executive board (IEB) is driving improvement effectively and holding the interim executive headteacher and senior leaders robustly to account.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate pupils' learning and progress in mathematics by ensuring that:
 - teachers have high expectations of all pupils
 - learning activities develop pupils' accuracy and fluency in mathematics and provide opportunities for them to deepen their understanding through reasoning and problem solving
 - teachers use assessment information to identify how well pupils are doing in mathematics and to plan their next steps in learning
 - leaders monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in mathematics closely so that areas for improvement in teachers' practice are quickly identified and tackled.
- Accelerate the learning and progress of the most-able pupils by ensuring that:
 - leaders and teachers use information about pupils' prior attainment to set challenging targets
 - learning activities challenge pupils and enable them to show deeper knowledge and understanding in their written work
 - leaders keep a close eye on pupils' progress and intervene quickly to get them back on track.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, by:
 - increasing levels of attendance and reducing persistent absence
 - strengthening the curriculum so that pupils have more opportunities to learn about and discuss personal and social issues such as health and relationships.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management **requires improvement**

- The interim executive headteacher is passionate about Lever Park pupils being 'the best they can be'. Together with senior leaders, he has tackled the significant weaknesses identified at the last section 5 inspection with urgency, determination and resolve.
- Senior leaders know the school's key strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes, however, leaders do not focus sharply enough on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress when they are checking teachers' practice. As a result, important areas for improvement are occasionally missed.
- Middle leadership is not as strong as senior leadership. Some middle leaders are new and do not have the depth of knowledge and leadership experience needed to drive improvement without direction and support from senior leaders.
- Professional development and training for staff are having a positive impact. The strong partnership with a local teaching school is helping leaders to refine and further develop their improvement plans. Although much has been done to improve teachers' practice, the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires further improvement.
- The interim executive headteacher's higher expectations are evident in more challenging performance targets for senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers. However, it is too early to gauge whether the school's new performance management system is helping senior leaders to hold their colleagues more robustly to account.
- The curriculum has been improved since the last inspection. Pupils' learning and development is extended by a growing programme of educational visits and extra-curricular activities. This includes after-school revision and booster sessions for Year 11 pupils. However, the school's programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) does not give pupils enough opportunities to learn about and discuss personal and social issues such as health and relationships. This area of the curriculum requires improvement.
- Additional funding, including the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up premium, is used effectively for pastoral support, to enhance the curriculum and for targeted intervention programmes. Almost all pupils are entitled to pupil premium and benefit from the school's additional provision.
- Pupils' moral and social development and the values of tolerance and respect for other people are promoted effectively in all areas of the school's work. Pupils learn about Britain's cultural heritage and the diversity of the communities where they live. This helps them to be well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Members of the IEB have high expectations and share the interim executive headteacher's passion for Leaver Park pupils to be 'the best they can be'.
 - The IEB has made a strong contribution to Lever Park's recovery. IEB members are knowledgeable about key areas of the school's work. The IEB meets frequently and members carefully check and robustly challenge the reports and information they receive from the interim executive headteacher.
 - The local authority acted quickly and decisively to secure Leaver Park's leadership and governance following its last section 5 inspection when it was judged to require special measures.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe. Leaders and staff know pupils well, they take great care to identify when pupils need help and, when they do, they act quickly and decisively to keep them safe. Case studies show that the school works closely with other professionals and services to ensure that pupils and their families receive the help and support they need.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the last inspection. However, teaching is not good enough to ensure that pupils make consistently good progress.
- Typically, pupils settle to learning quickly at the start of lessons. Classroom routines are firmly established and pupils understand what is expected of them. At times, teachers' expectations are too low and, as a consequence, pupils do not focus as well on their learning. This inconsistency slows pupils' learning and progress.
- Pupils make fast progress when the work set is interesting and pitched at the right level. In a Key Stage 3 English lesson, for example, pupils' interest in *The tempest* was sparked by the teacher's engaging and

challenging questions about characters and the plot sequence. Pupils responded knowledgeably and with interest and, in doing so, developed and deepened their understanding of the play.

- Sometimes, the work set is not challenging enough for the most-able pupils. In mathematics, for example, the progress of the most-able pupils is held back because the work set is too easy. Pupils spend too long repeating calculations before moving on to more complex problems. This neither increases the accuracy or fluency of their work nor deepens their understanding.
- Teachers routinely assess pupils' progress in English and mathematics and pupils needing extra support or help are quickly identified. Specialist teaching in 'JUDO' time (extra English and mathematics lessons) helps these pupils to develop their knowledge and skills and build their confidence. At times, however, teachers do not make good enough use of assessment information to plan learning activities that are closely matched to pupils' levels of ability.
- The quality of work in pupils' books is variable. Pupils' recent work shows a growing pride and more positive attitudes to learning. However, the standard of pupils' written work is not high enough. In mathematics, pupils are not learning how to set out their working in a clear step-by-step way. As a result, pupils make mistakes in their calculations and lose marks when tackling examination questions.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils will learn in lessons are sometimes not clear or precise enough. As a result, teachers cannot easily check whether pupils are making fast enough progress and pupils do not know how well they are doing.
- The quality of marking and feedback has improved since the last inspection. Often, pupils are given helpful diagnostic feedback and expected to correct errors or re-draft work in 'fix-it' time. Occasionally, however, errors and misconceptions in pupils' work are missed or repeated in pupils' 'fix-it' work.
- Additional adults are effective in supporting pupils' learning and development. Relationships are strong and, because additional adults know 'what makes them tick', they quickly re-focus pupils on their learning if they are distracted, lose concentration or are struggling to manage their own behaviour.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils are now more confident and have more positive attitudes to learning. When the work set captures their interest and is pitched at the right level, pupils work hard and persevere with tasks. At times, however, when teachers' expectations are too low or when the work set is too hard or too easy, pupils' attitudes to learning are less positive. Although improving, the work in pupils' books does not show consistently positive attitudes to learning.
- Pupils say that they feel safe at Lever Park. They trust the adults who care for them, say that they are well supported and always get the help they need.
- Leaders keep a close eye on pupils attending alternative provision. The small number of placements are carefully matched to pupils' interests and learning programmes are well planned. Pupils say that they enjoy their placements and value the opportunity to work and learn in a 'real life' setting.
- Pupils receive high-quality careers guidance and, as a consequence, all progress successfully onto further study or training at the end of Year 11.
- Pupils learn about how to stay safe and healthy in personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE). Although this area of the curriculum has been recently strengthened, pupils say that they would like more opportunities to learn about and discuss personal and social issues such as health and relationships.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- There has been a marked improvement in pupils' behaviour since the last inspection. Senior leaders keep a close eye on pupils' behaviour; they intervene quickly and effectively when they have concerns. As a result, there are fewer incidents of challenging behaviour and a strong downward trend in exclusions.
- Although pupils have responded well to the school's higher expectations, low-level disruptive behaviour is still evident in lessons when work is not matched well enough to pupils' interests or levels of ability.
- Much has been done to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence and, as a consequence, levels of absence and persistent absence are decreasing. However, attendance remains below the national average

for secondary schools and persistent absence remains high.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils' attainment in English, mathematics and a wide range of academic and vocational subjects has improved since the last inspection. In 2015, more pupils achieved GCSE passes in English, mathematics, science, physical education (PE) and art. More pupils achieved Level 1 and 2 qualifications in information and communications technology (ICT), horticulture, construction, motor vehicle studies and catering.
- The progress made by current pupils in all year groups and in a wide range of subjects is improving steadily but remains variable. The strengthening quality of teaching is having a positive impact on pupils' progress, especially in English.
- From their different starting points, progress made by pupils in English and mathematics is increasing. However, rates of progress remain below national averages. Progress is stronger in English than in mathematics. The most-able pupils do not make fast enough progress, especially in mathematics.
- Pupils' progress in other subjects is variable. In physical education (PE) and art, for example, more Year 11 pupils are on track to achieve their target GCSE grades. In science, however, the gap between pupils' current attainment and their target GCSE grade is wide.
- In 2015, all pupils moved onto further education or training at the end of Year 11. The school's tracking information shows that all have successfully sustained places on their chosen courses. All current Year 11 pupils have provisional offers of places at further education colleges.

School details

Unique reference number	131692
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10010173

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	Special
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	69
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Mary Powell
Headteacher	Paul Hodgkinson
Telephone number	01204 332666
Website	www.leverparkschool.co.uk
Email address	office@leverpark.bolton.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 November 2014

Information about this school

- Lever Park School is a smaller than average-sized special school for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is much higher than the national average. At the time of the inspection, 68 out of 69 pupils on roll were supported through the pupil premium.
- Typically, there are many more boys than girls on the school's roll.
- Almost all pupils are from a White British background and very few speak English as an additional language.
- Most pupils join the school in Year 7 but some join in Years 8 to 11. Most pupils have been permanently excluded from other schools and have experienced a period of disruption before joining Lever Park.
- The school uses three alternative providers: Harmony Project, Heartlift and Redbox Training.
- The interim executive headteacher has been in post since November 2014.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the section 5 inspection which took place in November 2014. It was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the Education Act 2005.
- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 17 lessons, nine of which were observed jointly with senior leaders, spoke to pupils and examined the work in their books and folders.
- Inspectors examined documents relating to governance, school improvement planning, self-evaluation, pupils' progress, attendance, behaviour, the curriculum and safeguarding.
- Meetings were held with pupils, the interim executive headteacher, senior and middle leaders and the Chair of the Interim Executive Board. Inspectors spoke to representatives from the local authority and Lever Park's school improvement partner.
- Inspectors visited Harmony Project, one of the school's alternative providers.
- Inspectors considered the information recorded on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and took account of 14 pupil questionnaires and 14 staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Nick Whittaker, lead inspector
Doreen Davenport

Her Majesty's Inspector
Ofsted Inspector

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