

Lanchester Community Free School

Hempstead Road, Watford, Hertfordshire WD17 3HD

Inspection dates

16–17 May 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
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	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The trust, governors and the principal have not ensured that senior leaders at Lanchester are sufficiently supported to take this growing school to its next stage.
- Governors and the trust rely too heavily on the information supplied to them by the principal and do not make sufficiently rigorous checks on its accuracy. As a result, they have an overgenerous view of the effectiveness of some aspects of the school's work.
- Leaders do not rigorously evaluate the school's strengths and weaknesses. They do not, therefore, accurately identify emerging priorities or check to ensure that areas for improvement have been successfully tackled.
- Targets related to performance management are not always linked closely enough to pupils' outcomes or to the effectiveness with which leaders and teachers undertake their roles.
- Middle leader development is in its early stages. Consequently, roles are not evenly spread across the school and too much responsibility falls on too few people.
- The quality of teaching and the use of assessment are good throughout the school. As a result, the majority of pupils make good progress in English and mathematics.
- Pupils in Year 1 have achieved above the national average in the phonics screening check since 2015. Pupils enjoy reading and are beginning to use a variety of strategies to understand more difficult books.
- Children in Reception achieve above the national average and are well prepared for the move into Year 1. Opportunities for working with parents are developing. The outdoor learning environment is not freely accessible to children. As a result, child-initiated learning in a larger area than the classrooms is limited.
- The school's motto, 'For a better future', is reflected well in the provision of social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, which is a strength of the school.
- Parents are very positive about the school. They say their children are happy, enjoy going to school and that behaviour is good.
- Pupils enjoy going to school and the vast majority attend regularly, taking part in the array of opportunities the school offers. There remains a small group of pupils whose attendance is below the national average.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the early years by:
 - increasing the access children have to outdoor independent learning so that it is more in line with good practice in the early years
 - increase the opportunities that parents are given to contribute to the learning and progress of their children.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the trust secures good leadership of the school as it grows, and supports existing and new leaders in their roles
 - governors have the skills and confidence to rigorously check the work of the school
 - through rigorous self-evaluation, leaders sharpen plans for improvement to accurately reflect the school's emerging priorities, time-limited actions are planned, and the impact on pupils' outcomes is thoroughly evaluated
 - targets for performance management are more closely linked with pupils' outcomes and the effectiveness with which leaders and teachers undertake their roles
 - the roles of new senior and middle leaders are developed so that they understand the part they play in the growing school's needs
 - continue to improve the attendance of the small groups of pupils who are persistently absent
 - the school's new and existing designated child protection leaders know and understand their statutory role and are fulfilling it effectively.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The trust, governors and the principal have not supported leadership sufficiently well within the school to take it to its next stage as it has grown and continues to do so. As a result, too much falls on the shoulders of too few people and little strategic action is taken.
- The trust's and governors' involvement in the school's self-evaluation is not rigorous enough. They rely too heavily on the information that the principal provides and have not thoroughly checked on its accuracy. As a result, the school's self-evaluation is overgenerous. The trust and governors do not, therefore, have an accurate view of some aspects of the school, and in particular the strengths and weaknesses of leadership and management.
- Although willing, the contribution of middle leaders in the school is varied. For many, leadership roles are relatively new as the school continues to grow. It is too early to see the impact of their work over time. This is especially true for curriculum leaders, who have not stamped their mark on the quality of teaching in subjects other than English or mathematics.
- The pupil premium grant has been used effectively to support disadvantaged pupils, especially those who have social and emotional difficulties. The impact of the support for their academic progress is inconsistent for a variety of reasons, including some persistent absence. The school is working hard to address this and some improvements, although slow, have been made.
- The principal, who is also the special educational needs coordinator, has responsibility for ensuring that additional funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is effectively used. However, she is not monitoring this area effectively to ensure that the decisions she makes are making a difference to some pupils. Strategies teachers employ within their classes are largely successful, but some interventions to support this group's progress are not evaluated well enough by the principal to see if they are having as much impact as they might.
- The primary sport funding is used well to improve pupils' participation in, and enjoyment of, physical activity. The school employs sports coaches who are supporting teachers in developing their skills to teach high-quality physical education as the school grows. A variety of clubs are also offered which are very popular with pupils.

- The school is developing a curriculum to ensure that pupils develop their skills from the Reception Year to the end of key stage 2, albeit that the school currently only has pupils up to Year 2. A good range of subjects and clubs are offered, including Spanish for all pupils, yoga, pottery, science, and information and communication technology (ICT) clubs. Teachers plan exciting and interesting visits to local areas of interest like the Royal Gunpowder Mills and Chiltern Open Air Museum, so that pupils have opportunities to find out about the past and gain an increasing awareness of the world around them. Visitors are also a key feature of the school's curriculum. To inspire and challenge pupils, the assistant principal arranged a visit from the world's second female pilot to fly solo to Australia in a 1942 biplane. Pupils thoroughly enjoyed the activities that developed their skills in geography, history, science, English and mathematics, including a clear example of how the school promotes resilience – as the pilot crashed but persevered.
- The school is committed to further developing its links with the local community and its parents. There are regular opportunities for parents to participate in workshops so that they better understand the school's work – for example, in spelling, phonics, anti-bullying, and the recently introduced and popular 'stick, mark, boom!' learning strategy. Parents have mostly positive views about the school and the opportunities it offers their children.
- Leaders promote equality of opportunity and diversity. No one at the school tolerates any discrimination, and the school promotes collaboration with each other. Much has been done by leaders to ensure that pupils have a very positive attitude towards each other. A pupil's view is: 'You can be friends with everyone. Everyone's the same.'

Governance

- The local governing body's members are committed to ensuring the best outcomes for pupils in the school. Both collectively and individually, they have a good set of skills to support the school as its needs change. They have shown through governing body meetings that they have challenged the principal but they have not checked on the accuracy of her responses. Governors are, however, well equipped to offer greater insight, support and challenge in the future as the school grows.
- The governing body and the leaders of the trust have, however, not accurately identified the school's emerging and existing priorities or precisely evaluated the progress being made. As a consequence, neither the trust nor the governing body has a clear understanding of the developing needs of the school. This has resulted in too many roles for too few senior leaders, and insufficient time for the principal to effectively fulfil all of her responsibilities as a part-time principal.
- The school will be in an increasingly vulnerable position from September because so many key members of staff, who know the school well and who are currently leading it as effectively as they are able, are leaving. Although leaders have recruited to one of those positions, there are several that are not yet filled and these appointments will be crucial to the future success of the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- Although governors, the trust and the Department for Education (DfE) are regular visitors to the school, the checks that they have made on the quality of the principal's safeguarding and child protection records have not been rigorous or comprehensive. As a result, some areas of this aspect of the school's work were not complete or appropriate at the start of the inspection. After much work by the whole senior leadership team to make the required improvements during the second day of the inspection, these aspects were reviewed again and considered by the inspection team to be effective.
- Leaders, governors and the trust are taking effective action to address the challenges the school faces regarding the safety of its pupils. Doors opening directly onto the adjacent college's car park are now alarmed to alert leaders should any pupil try to leave the building. Appropriate risk assessments are in place to ensure that pupils, who have access to the front of the school's grounds, cannot get out onto the main road or the college's driveway. Regular fire drills, including one requested by inspectors, ensure that pupils and staff know the appropriate routes out of the building to the point of safety. However, as the school continues to grow and pupils will be using the top floor of the building, the trust will need to regularly review the school's procedures for the safe and prompt evacuation of the building in an emergency.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers use their assessment of pupils' learning to effectively plan future learning with tasks that engage the whole class and address the needs of particular groups of pupils. Teachers build regular opportunities for pupils to consolidate and secure their learning. As a result, the vast majority of pupils make good progress.
- Teachers have secure subject knowledge that they use to further pupils' understanding in mathematics and their skills in English. Year 2 pupils are reading buddies for Reception children which the pupils really enjoy, one parent commenting: 'In my opinion this is fantastic for both children and all my boys enjoy it.' Teachers and learning support practitioners have developed pupils' reading abilities resulting in consistent numbers reaching the required standard in the phonics screening check. However, leaders are aware that some colleagues' phonics subject knowledge is not as secure as others.
- Teachers use a range of effective strategies to help pupils to understand concepts in practical ways. In mathematics, pupils use practical resources to explore mathematical ideas. This is particularly effective in the early years and follows through into Year 1. The mathematics leader recognises and has prioritised ensuring that Year 2 pupils have sufficient opportunities to use practical resources to solve problems and deepen their learning.
- Lessons are usually lively and interesting, capturing pupils' imagination. For example, pupils in Year 2 were learning about seed dispersal. The teacher used real sycamore seeds and a video of seeds falling to beautifully demonstrate the process. Pupils could say why brown sycamore seeds fly better than green: 'because they are dead and more delicate'.

- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and closely follow the school's behaviour policy. The very occasional low-level disruption is addressed quickly and effectively. As a result, pupils are ready for learning and settle quickly to the tasks that teachers provide, excited often by what is being asked of them. In Year 1, pupils were innovating the story of Goldilocks and the three bears. Pupils clearly enjoyed the opportunity they had to change one aspect of the story – for example, saying, 'I am having Shreddies in my bowl instead of porridge', while another changed the setting of the story to Legoland rather than the woods.
- Teachers and learning support practitioners know their pupils well and plan and intervene accordingly. Additional support for pupils whom teachers have identified may be at risk of falling behind in their learning is effective. Although a minority of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are progressing slower than others, there are a variety of reasons for this. There are striking examples, seen by the lead inspector, of individuals making very good progress because teachers have put in place effective support, especially, for example, with social interaction and behaviour development.
- Recently, the school has worked on one of its key skills to help pupils develop perseverance in their learning. This is proving very successful and inspectors saw pupils who are keen to 'have a go' and to ask other pupils to check on their learning. 'Do I need a question mark there, do you think?' asked one Year 1 pupil of another during a phonics session. What then ensued was a lively conversation between them with adults standing back and listening but always ready to support appropriately.
- Teachers set up clear routines to encourage positive learning behaviour and, as a result, pupils move quickly between classes and tasks. Teachers use a range of strategies to probe pupils' understanding. There were many examples of teachers' questions effectively moving pupils on in their learning in both oral and written feedback in pupils' books. 'What happened to her at the end of the story?' wrote a teacher in a Year 1 pupil's book. The pupil then responded with 'The giant started to chase her.'
- There is evidence of challenge in the teaching of 'enquiry' in areas such as seed dispersal in science, or when pupils are asked about the gases we breathe in and out. However, leaders recognise that this is not yet consistent. As the curriculum is developing, integrating English and mathematics skills across areas such as geography, history and ICT is becoming more evident, but it is also not yet consistent.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils show respect and care for each other. They value their classmates' opinions and work happily and cooperatively in lessons. In paired and group discussions, pupils' debating skills are often impressive, especially for their age.
- Pupils thrive in the positive, well-ordered and caring school environment. Displays are bright and attractive. In classrooms, pupils are encouraged to use the working walls and share their initial thoughts about new learning.

- Pupils say they feel safe at all times, including online. Road safety is reinforced appropriately, especially bearing in mind the busy road on which the school is sited. They know if they have any worries they can use the 'grumble box'. Or, if not, pupils who were spoken to knew an adult they would feel comfortable talking to about their concerns.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is a strength of the school. Pupils talked convincingly to the lead inspector about how they learned about people from other countries and cultures, and how they would treat others. The weekly trips to the residential home is testament to how much leaders want to engage with the community, and also share with their pupils other people's lives and perspectives. Pupils read to the residents and clearly it is a delight for both the pupils and the residents themselves. Such activities as celebrating International Family Day, taking part in dances from around the world, listening to a visitor speaking about Ramadan and a parent talking about the Muslim Night of Forgiveness are regular features in the curriculum.
- Pupils like the breakfast and after-school clubs that the school operates. They are well attended and offer pupils the opportunity to meet with others in an informal way. Parents say that their children enjoy coming to this 'friendly and welcoming school', one saying: 'I am constantly amazed at the level of progress of my child. This is because every member of staff gives 100%.' This is a glowing endorsement and one of several that inspectors evidenced during the inspection.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The strong relationships that are nurtured in school ensure that pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around school. Pupils are polite, courteous and have good manners.
- Playtimes are harmonious occasions, where pupils play happily together and no one is left out. Pupils from Years 1 and 2 act as 'play leaders', set out activities for the others to do and make sure that 'everyone plays nicely'.
- Pupils enjoy their learning and work conscientiously. Incidents of low-level disruption are rare. Behaviour systems encourage positive attitudes to learning and the very few instances of misbehaviour are well addressed. Pupils say there is very little bullying and 'If someone is sad, we take them to a teacher.'
- Every opportunity is taken to reinforce acceptable behaviour both inside and outside the school. During the school assembly that inspectors visited, pupils learned the slogan 'Plant pride... not litter'. There was an audible intake of breath when pupils were shown pictures of litter in the street, demonstrating clearly pupils' shock and disapproval.
- The school continues to work hard to improve the attendance of a small number of pupils whose attendance is below the national average. A range of strategies to ensure that parents understand the importance of regular, punctual attendance have been put in place. As a result, attendance has improved for many individuals during the last year. Leaders are slowly reducing the persistent absence of a few pupils to some degree of success.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Being a new school, this year is the first time that the school has had Year 2 pupils. There are therefore no national published outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 1, nor is there a previous inspection report with which to compare outcomes.
- The school's own assessment information and the work in pupils' books seen by inspectors during the inspection, evidence that pupils currently in Year 2 are on track to attain above the 2016 national average in reading, writing and mathematics in summer 2017. Progress of pupils from the end of the early years is also looking strong, although some most-able pupils are not yet achieving as much as they might in mathematics.
- The proportions of pupils who achieved the expected standards in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 in 2015 and 2016 were above the national average. The proportion of current pupils on track to achieve a similar outcome in 2017, according to the school's own assessment information, is 88%.
- The progress of current most-able pupils and most-able disadvantaged pupils largely matches that of their classmates, particularly in the Reception Year, Year 1 in reading, writing and mathematics, and Year 2 in reading and writing. There are many stunning examples of pupils' writing in Year 2.
- As a result of the effective use of pupil premium funding, the small group of disadvantaged pupils in each year group make similar progress in English and mathematics to their classmates. Much has been put in place to support individuals whose needs are varied and wide, with a good measure of success.
- Teachers are quick to identify any pupils who are at risk of falling behind. Staff make effective provision for these pupils through activities which are matched well to their individual needs and abilities. This includes pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has recently changed the way that pupils' needs are identified and their support plans are written. While inspectors acknowledge that this is developing and is not significantly impairing pupils' progress, leaders accept that targets could be more challenging, and should be more closely monitored at leadership level and shared more routinely with teachers.

Early years provision

Good

- The majority of children enter the Reception Year with skills that are in line with those typically found, and get a good start to their education in the Reception classes. This is because teachers have a good understanding of what is required to help children make good progress. Adults model expectations well and create a stimulating environment for children to explore and learn, both independently and with adult guidance.
- The proportion of children reaching a good level of development has been above the national average for the last two years. Children currently in the Reception classes are on track to achieve similarly in 2017. Their progress is carefully monitored and where there are gaps in children's knowledge, understanding or skills, teachers plan well to fill those gaps.

- There are too few disadvantaged children to comment on without identifying individuals. However, the trainee early years leader has ensured that teachers accurately assess children's needs and plan appropriate provision for these children and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Teachers use different ways to ensure that children understand what they are being taught. One Reception class found the concept of 'sharing' in mathematics quite challenging. However, the teacher used the final part of the lesson very well to address any misconceptions. She asked some children to stand at the front of the class while she shared items between them, reinforcing the terms 'equally', 'fairly' and 'fair test'.
- Children's interests are taken into account when planning the curriculum and children are keen to engage in learning. However, children do not have ready access to their outside learning environment. The area is shared with the Squirrels Nursery. Although staff ensure that opportunities are planned for children to go outside, the learning environment does not reflect that of the classrooms, nor does it enable children to engage as much as they might in their own learning in a wider, open space.
- Children's personal development and welfare are promoted well. The early years curriculum reflects the rest of the school's good opportunities for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Parents are very appreciative of the opportunities they have to take part in such activities as the 'family picnic' and one parent said: 'I wish I had had these opportunities when I was at school. What better way for a child to learn?'
- There are good links with parents as a number of children come to the school having been at the on-site Nursery. Leaders recognise, however, that there is scope for further improvement. Development of the part that parents can play in supporting children's needs, and helping the school to identify children's next steps in their learning, can only be of benefit to all children. This is especially so for those children who are learning English as an additional language or those who enter the school with skills that are below those typically found.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff make sure that children are kept safe and know how to keep themselves safe while taking appropriate risks in their learning and play activities.

School details

Unique reference number	140954
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10031329

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	164
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Natalie Moss
Principal	Helen Lockham
Telephone number	01923 224 160
Website	www.lanchestercfs.org.uk
Email address	office@lanchestercfs.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with DfE guidance on what academies should publish.
- Lanchester Community Free School opened in 2014 with children in the Reception classes only. Pupils have now moved up through the school into Years 1 and 2. The school currently is smaller than the average primary school. In September 2017, the school's first cohort of pupils will move into key stage 2. The full complement of pupils through to Year 6 will be complete by 2020.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is below the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is below the national average.
- The school runs its own breakfast and after-school club within its offer of 'wrap-around' care.
- The school is situated in a refurbished listed building. Pupils' and parents' access to the school is via a busy main road or through a side entrance which has vehicular access to West Herts College. A public footpath runs alongside the rear of the school with direct access to the college's car park.
- The school is part of the West Herts Community Free School Trust and houses the separately managed Squirrels Nursery. The principal of the school works between Lanchester and Ascot Road Free School.
- There have been a number of changes in staffing since the school opened, and there will be significant changes in leadership in September 2017.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of teaching and learning in parts of lessons during the two days, much of which was with the principal or senior leaders. Inspectors also observed leaders' feedback to some individual teachers.
- During the inspection, inspectors spoke with pupils, both individually and in a group, about their learning and safety.
- Inspectors listened to pupils reading individually and spoke with those pupils about their reading. They reviewed pupils' work in lessons and talked to pupils about their work during lessons. Inspectors also analysed a wide range of pupils' work from all classes with the two senior leaders who have responsibility for leading English and mathematics.
- Inspectors held meetings with the principal, other senior leaders, members of the school's local governing body and other staff. Inspectors met with the chair and chief executive officer of the trust. The lead inspector had a telephone conversation with the school's link adviser from the DfE.
- The lead inspector looked at the school's review of its own performance, its plans for improvement, school policies and minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation in relation to child protection, safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors spoke with parents at the start and end of the school day. The views of 86 parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, the 52 text responses and three letters from parents were taken into account. Inspectors also considered the nine responses to the staff online survey and those of pupils who completed the school's own survey in 2016.

Inspection team

Ruth Brock, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Wendy Varney

Her Majesty's Inspector

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