

Limespring School

Park House, 16 High Road, East Finchley, London N2 9PJ

Inspection dates

20–22 September 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The school's proprietor is also the headteacher. She recognised that she had too much to do and needed to delegate responsibilities. Work to raise standards and support pupils to achieve their potential is now under way.
- Governance is underdeveloped. The headteacher has the informal support of an expert advisory board, and is rightly in the process of replacing this with a formal governing body.
- Checks on how well staff perform are too basic. They lack detail, deadlines and the effect on pupils' development.
- The quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes require improvement because leaders do not know pupils' starting points in all subjects, or how much progress pupils have made. Anecdotal information is too heavily relied on. A new system for monitoring progress following more consistent checks on pupils' starting points is being developed.
- Some teaching staff lack the knowledge and skills to teach pupils with specific learning difficulties.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils, who typically have not enjoyed attending previous schools, love learning at Limespring. Staff successfully and rapidly raise their self-esteem. Pupils' personal development and behaviour are outstanding.
- Parents are overwhelmingly happy. 'Life changing', 'miracle' and 'my son/daughter is a different child' are a few examples of how the school's impact was described. Every parent who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school.
- Safeguarding is effective. Pupils feel cared for and parents trust the school's leaders to keep their children safe.
- Parents and pupils appreciate the richness of the curriculum. Trips to museums, galleries and theatres enrich pupils' learning. Pupils especially enjoy the range of creative arts available, such as dance, drama, music and art.
- Leaders have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and pupils' outcomes by ensuring that:
 - the headteacher is fully supported by the new school manager and the new governing body in making the necessary changes to raise standards
 - checks on staff's performance are focused, meaningful and have measurable, positive effects on pupils' performance
 - appropriate training is provided to those with teaching responsibilities to rapidly raise the quality of specialist teaching, learning and assessment
 - pupils' starting points are consistently and accurately identified and their progress in all subjects is recorded, monitored and evaluated.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The school's proprietor, who is also the headteacher, has ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- As the school has grown, and staffing has changed, the headteacher has ended up having to do too much and this has impacted on the quality of provision. At the time of the inspection, it was the new school manager's third day in post. This new position is part of a suitable plan to delegate responsibilities away from the headteacher. This will enable her to focus her time and expertise on training and monitoring teachers to raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- As a result of this plan to streamline leadership responsibilities, the monitoring of the quality of teaching is developing, as is the school's system for checking on teachers' strengths and areas for development. Many informal visits are made to classrooms, and checks on planning and pupils' work are regular. These checks have not raised standards sufficiently because feedback and actions are not documented or linked to teachers' performance.
- The curriculum is appropriately designed to meet pupils' special educational needs and is rich in cultural and creative experiences. Pupils enjoy a thematic curriculum, which is well complemented by an engaging assembly programme and personal, social, health and economic education sessions which have a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Recent and regular experiences include visits from inspiring speakers, theatre trips to the West End, music workshops, termly concerts at a local community centre and visits to the British Museum, the National Gallery and public institutions such as the Houses of Parliament and the local fire station. As a result of the broad, enriching curriculum and a flexible approach, pupils are well prepared for their next steps and as young citizens in modern London and Britain.
- The school is appropriately staffed and well resourced. The staff team is united, positive and cares deeply about pupils' welfare.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school's work, especially in terms of their children's personal development and happiness. All those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to other parents.

Governance

- Until now, the proprietors have governed the school. The lack of external support, insight and challenge has meant that leaders have not kept fully abreast with changes in legislation and guidance since the last inspection.
- A new governing body is forming to replace the current advisory board, which currently comprises two experts, one in neuropsychology and another in dyslexia education. The terms of reference for the governing body are in development and one of the school manager's responsibilities will be to oversee the administration of governance.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's designated safeguarding leaders are appropriately trained and take their roles very seriously. Parents told the inspector that they trusted leaders to keep their children safe.
- A safeguarding culture of vigilance pervades the work of the school. Concerns are rare, very well documented and referred on to external agencies where necessary.
- All relevant staff training is up to date. The school's safeguarding policy reflects the most recent statutory guidance, 'Keeping children safe in education' (September 2016). It is published on the school's website alongside all other required policies and information.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement because many teachers and support teachers are new or still training as specialists in teaching pupils with specific learning difficulties. The headteacher is working hard to dedicate more of her time to training staff, role-modelling strong practice and checking on teachers' strengths and areas for development more thoroughly.
- Teachers' planning appropriately considers how to meet pupils' learning needs and interests. However, teachers do not always know pupils' starting points or how much progress they have made because the school's system for this is not yet in place.
- Teaching engages pupils and helps to develop their confidence and self-esteem. Pupils ask questions, engage in discussion and are enthused about their learning. Pupils' reading and writing skills, an especial focus for those with dyslexia, are well developed.
- There are excellent relationships between pupils and staff. Pupils feel able to seek guidance and are confident to say when they do not understand.
- Although the school is rightly a nurturing environment, teachers have high expectations of pupils and set appropriately challenging work.
- Teachers' management of behaviour in class is highly effective.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- On arrival, pupils have typically had poor experiences of education. Some have refused to attend school. Limespring prioritises the development of pupils' social and emotional well-being and rapidly raises their self-esteem.
- Parents consistently described the transformation in their child, often describing the work of the school as 'life changing'. One told the inspector that after just a few days in the school, 'I had a different child. It was as if somebody had flicked a switch. Suddenly my child was smiling, wanting to go to school and happy to do their homework.' Another

parent said on arrival to the school that their child's 'self-esteem was on the floor. Now it's through the roof.'

- Pupils confirmed the school's effective safeguarding arrangements. They were universally confident in telling the inspector that they feel very safe. They like the fact that their school is small and said that they quickly build strong friendships and feel like a family. They say there is no bullying and everybody is kind to one another.
- Pupils are very well prepared for their next steps, and many successfully move on to mainstream secondary schools. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including online, and about making healthy choices. The school's highly effective approach to developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding equips them to become thoughtful, caring and reflective.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils behave extremely well, during and outside lessons. Throughout the inspection, every pupil seen was entirely focused on their learning. The school's rewards-focused behaviour system is highly effective in reinforcing positive behaviours. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about collecting stickers and earning certificates, and were particularly excited to tell the inspector about 'getting to gold' and even earning the right to enjoy a class party.
- There are no records of sanctions for serious misbehaviour or bullying because there have never been any such incidents. Behavioural incidents recorded on incident forms are minor and swiftly followed up.
- Pupils do not want to miss a day of school. The vast majority attend very regularly. Where there is absence, it is typically due to health conditions or religious festivals. Leaders rapidly and robustly monitor and follow up lateness and absence.
- Staff are committed to understanding pupils' complex needs and use the school's positive behaviour system consistently to raise their self-esteem, while maintaining very high expectations of pupils' behaviour, attitudes to learning and effort.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The progress pupils make in all areas of learning is unclear because there is no consistent system in place to identify it. Each pupil's attainment in their core skills is checked to confirm their starting points on entry to the school. However, this is not consistent enough, and in other subject areas pupils' outcomes require improvement.
- Although many pupils make good or better progress – for example, in their reading, writing and spelling – leaders are unable to provide consistent, accurate information about pupils' progress and outcomes across the curriculum.
- Pupils typically arrive at the school with low self-esteem and significant gaps in their education. As a result of the school's use of resources, nurturing approach and specialist teaching, pupils make good progress in a range of areas, especially in their social skills, emotional well-being, and reading, writing and mathematics.

- Pupils' personal progress in their social skills and emotional well-being is recorded anecdotally and in case studies. Leaders, with the support of the new governing body, are in the process of creating a system to formally track and evaluate this progress.
- The overwhelming majority of pupils who leave the school have caught up for lost time and proceed successfully to a range of secondary schools.

School details

Unique reference number	137890
DfE registration number	302/6003
Inspection number	10008526

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Independent day special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	20
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Denise Drinkwater and Nick Jones
Headteacher	Denise Drinkwater
Annual fees (day pupils)	£21,600
Telephone number	020 8444 1387
Website	www.limespringschool.co.uk
Email address	ddrinkwater@limespringschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	6–7 February 2013

Information about this school

- Limespring School is an independent special day school for pupils who have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia. Most pupils have other complex special educational, social and emotional needs.
- A minority of pupils have an education, health and care plan and are placed by their local authority.
- The school also provides additional tuition and support to pupils on a part-time basis who are enrolled at other schools.
- The school's last inspection was a full standard inspection in February 2013, when its overall effectiveness was judged to be good.

Information about this inspection

- This full standard inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed a range of teaching and learning, some jointly with the headteacher. He also observed an assembly, met with two groups of pupils, observed a staff meeting and held a meeting with staff.
- The inspector scrutinised the school's information about pupils' progress and their attendance and behaviour.
- The inspector held meetings with the proprietor (who is also the school's headteacher), head of learning, head of pastoral care and the new school manager. He also had a telephone conversation with a member of the school's advisory board.
- The inspector spoke with a representative from a placing local authority.
- The inspector considered the 14 responses to Parent View. He also met with five parents.
- The inspection considered the nine responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspector reviewed a wide range of documentation, including school policies, logs, evidence of staff training, and information related to safeguarding and health and safety.
- The inspector toured the premises and considered additional information and evidence in relation to the independent school standards.

Inspection team

James Waite, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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