

# Lanchester Community Free School

Hempstead Road, Watford, Hertfordshire WD17 3HD

## Inspection dates

9–10 July 2019

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Despite considerable turbulence in leadership, the determined principal has successfully focused on ensuring the quality of education at Lanchester Community Free School is good.
- The principal is ably supported by the senior and middle leaders. All leaders share the principal's ambition for pupils. They make a strong contribution to the good and improving picture of teaching and, consequently, pupils' outcomes.
- Senior leaders and governors receive clear strategic guidance from the West Herts School Trust (WHST). Additionally, leaders have benefited from effective support provided by the local authority.
- Senior leaders and governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. They have secure plans in place to address remaining issues.
- Staff work well as a team and are motivated to make the school the best that it can be.
- Teaching is good as a result of well-considered training, high expectations and rigorous performance management.
- Leaders and governors have ensured that the curriculum is well planned, with a rich variety of creative activities and memorable experiences that effectively prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Teachers generally plan activities that are suited well to pupils' next steps in their learning.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They are friendly and well mannered. Pupils say that they enjoy school. They work hard and are keen to learn.
- Parents are very positive about the school. They agree that their children receive a good standard of education and are well cared for.
- Governors are committed and well equipped to provide strong support to leaders. They challenge leaders effectively about many aspects of the school's performance. However, they do not yet do so with sufficient rigour in relation to the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes across subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Pupils in key stage 1 do not apply their knowledge of phonics and grammar consistently in their writing in all subjects. Consequently, the standard of their writing varies across the curriculum.
- The early years provides well for children's needs and they make good progress. However, the learning environment is not yet fully developed to enable children to be consistently purposefully engaged when they are not working with an adult.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that governors increase their understanding of the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes across subjects other than English and mathematics, so that they can hold subject leaders more stringently to account.
- Improve the teaching of writing throughout key stage 1 so that the standard of pupils' writing is consistently high across all subjects.
- Improve outcomes for children in the early years provision by consistently providing higher-quality learning opportunities when children are engaged in independent activities.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The school has seen several changes in leadership and staff since the previous inspection. The turbulence caused by these changes has left a legacy of poorer teaching and, subsequently, weaker outcomes. The current senior leadership team is positive, energised and successfully forging ahead with actions to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. As a result, current pupils receive a good and improving education.
- The principal sets high expectations and has a clear vision for doing what is right for pupils and their families. His strong leadership is steering improvements across many areas of school life, including the quality of teaching. The principal is ably supported by his enthusiastic and skilful assistant principal, senior and middle leaders, who all share his passion and determination to move the school forward.
- Senior leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Senior leaders are outward looking. They have developed effective relationships with a range of external agencies and other successful schools. They use the advice of other professionals such as local authority officers and advisory teachers well. This ensures that plans and initiatives are of good quality and informed by current research.
- Staff morale is high. Senior leaders use performance management, coaching and support to bring about ongoing improvements. Staff spoken with during the inspection stated that they feel well supported and proud to be working at the school. Staff seek opportunities to learn from each other, try out new ideas and make learning fun. Collaborative teamwork is a strong contributor to the school's success.
- Leaders monitor pupils' progress carefully and use their checks to challenge teachers. For instance, leaders now make sure that teachers are held to account stringently for pupils' achievement through focused pupil progress meetings. In addition, they ensure that pupils identified as needing extra help receive it. This makes a positive difference. The accurate identification of pupils' needs and effective monitoring of the impact of support mean that these pupils make good progress.
- Leaders have developed a creative and engaging curriculum of well-planned activities that capture the imagination of pupils. Carefully chosen visits and linked events help pupils to make meaningful connections across subjects. The variety of after-school clubs and the opportunity to learn Spanish enhance pupils' sporting and linguistic development.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted effectively and prepares them successfully for life in modern Britain. Pupils are thoughtful and sensitive to the needs of others and show respect for other people's beliefs and ideas. Pupils take part in elections to vote and decide which pupils will represent them on the school council. They become aware of different faiths through studying different cultures and festivals. Pupils reflect together on global issues and things that concern them. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Year 3 were considering the effects of deforestation on different communities and lifestyles.

- Leaders have strengthened the support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is enthusiastic and knowledgeable. She provides high-quality training and support for staff and ensures that funding is spent well. Regular reviews of pupils' progress ensure that teaching, including programmes of support, is well suited to pupils' needs. Consequently, pupils with SEND achieve well.
- Leaders ensure that the pupil premium funding is deployed effectively to address any gaps in the knowledge and skills of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders are very aware of the barriers disadvantaged pupils face and have taken effective steps to tackle these. They ensure that disadvantaged pupils have access to appropriate academic support and to extra-curricular opportunities, including after-school clubs. This means these pupils are involved in all aspects of school life and make good progress.
- The primary physical education (PE) and sport premium funding is spent effectively. Specialist teachers have been brought in to deliver high-quality PE lessons. Additionally, pupils have benefited from access to a variety of school sports clubs, competitive events and activities. As a result, more pupils are participating in a wider range of sports.
- Parents and carers are extremely supportive of the school. Almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to other parents. They consider that the school is led effectively, and their children are nurtured and taught well. One parent, summing up the views of almost all others, commented: 'This is a fantastic school, with great teachers and great leaders, I could not be happier with it.'
- The trust provides regular and effective strategic support for leaders and governors. The school works well with other schools in the trust and within the local area to support teachers' professional development and to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments.
- The local authority offers helpful support to the senior leaders. Local authority officers have provided training for senior and middle leaders to evaluate and improve their areas of responsibility more effectively.

### **Governance of the school**

- The trust has overall responsibility for governance of the school and has established clear roles and responsibilities for senior leaders and the local governing body. As a result, there is a consistent approach to improving the school. The trust makes sure that actions to move the school forward are monitored closely and leaders at all levels are held rigorously to account.
- Many governors on the local governing body are new to their roles. However, they are fully committed to the school and have quickly sought training, advice and support from the trust. As a result, the local governing body is confident and knowledgeable. Governors possess a good balance of relevant skills and experience.
- The records of local governing body meetings show that governors offer thoughtful support as well as rigorous challenge to the senior leaders in most areas of the school's work because they have a strong understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

- Governors keep up to date with leaders' actions through their regular visits to the school. In addition, they receive timely information from the principal through accurate and detailed reports.
- The local governing body holds senior leaders to account regarding its legal responsibilities, including safeguarding, effectively. Governors carefully monitor the spending of additional funding, such as the pupil premium and PE and sport premium. They are clear about the difference the spending makes to pupils' achievements.
- Governors effectively hold leaders to account for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in reading, writing and mathematics, as well as for pupils' outcomes. However, governors do not have a full or clear understanding of pupils' achievements across the wider curriculum. Consequently, their challenge and support for leaders lacks a sharp enough focus to check and improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in subjects other than English and mathematics.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding which places pupils at the heart of the school's work. Safer recruitment and vetting procedures are thorough. All pre-employment checks are carried out diligently and record-keeping is systematic and rigorous.
- Leaders have ensured that there are clear procedures for staff to follow if they have a concern about a pupil. During the inspection, several members of staff were checked for their knowledge and understanding of signs and symptoms of pupils being at risk. Staff and governors are clear about what to look out for because of the effective induction and continued training they receive.
- Designated safeguarding leaders work with a variety of external agencies to minimise vulnerable pupils' risk of harm. They act on concerns quickly and make further referrals when necessary. Furthermore, the designated safeguarding leaders are not afraid to escalate a concern if they feel that they have not received an adequate response from an external agency.
- Pupils can talk about ways in which they stay safe, including when they are online, moving around the school and crossing a road. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe 'everywhere in school' and they know to talk to the adults in the school who will help them with any concerns.
- The overwhelming majority of parents who spoke with the inspectors or who responded to Parent View agree that their children are happy, safe and well looked after at Lanchester Community Free School.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Leaders' high expectations, and the focused training they have provided for staff, have led to improvements in the quality of teaching. Teachers have clear routines and structures. They follow the school's chosen teaching approaches consistently. As a result, most pupils make good progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.

- The relationships between pupils and staff are positive, encouraging and highly conducive to learning. Staff know the pupils well. Pupils concentrate in their lessons because they enjoy the activities teachers have planned for them.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They use this well to make learning points clear and often model what they expect from pupils. In the two Year 1 classes, the teachers modelled how to write instructions to make flapjacks effectively. Both teachers questioned pupils carefully to help them to clarify their thinking and keep focused. Teachers throughout the school make sure pupils have ready access to a range of practical resources in their lessons, which pupils told inspectors 'help us to learn better'.
- Teachers assess pupils' work regularly and most plan appropriate tasks to build upon their earlier learning. Effective assessment procedures in reading, writing and mathematics ensure that leaders at all levels are able to monitor pupils' achievement to quickly identify individuals or groups who are at risk of falling behind their classmates. For example, in two parallel Year 3 mathematics lessons, the teachers continually assessed pupils' understanding as pupils divided numbers by grouping. The teachers intervened with focused questions, challenging pupils to show and explain what they did and why.
- Reading is given a high profile at the school. Most younger pupils develop their knowledge of sounds well because there is systematic teaching of phonics. They practise their reading regularly. Teachers monitor the reading of older pupils carefully and have high expectations. Older pupils read a wide range of fiction and non-fiction and can discuss these confidently. Engaging topics of work that include high-quality texts encourage pupils to improve their reading skills and enjoy reading for pleasure. All staff enthusiastically share the books they are currently reading, and these are displayed outside every classroom. Most pupils are equally animated and were able to speak to inspectors about their reading books, their favourite authors and their love of reading.
- The quality of mathematics teaching is good. Pupils, including the most able, are making greater progress as teachers check pupils' understanding and set them appropriate next steps for learning. Pupils are encouraged to develop their reasoning skills by solving increasingly complex mathematical problems. Pupils report that they enjoy their mathematics lessons.
- Learning support partners work skilfully alongside pupils so that pupils are fully engaged in lessons. They provide strong support to pupils who need additional help, including those pupils with SEND. Carefully planned work or focused support mean that this group of pupils make good progress.
- More precise teaching of writing is developing pupils' skills of grammar, punctuation and vocabulary well. In key stage 2, pupils use these skills effectively in their creative writing or in other areas of the curriculum, such as science or history. Their writing is interesting and accurate. However, pupils across key stage 1 do not apply their writing skills routinely when writing in other subjects and consequently the quality of their writing is too variable across the wider curriculum.

## Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils develop good personal and social skills because adults are good role models. They expect pupils to be respectful to others, and to be kind and caring. As a result, pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Most listen attentively when their teachers talk to them and respond well to their instructions.
- Pupils enjoy school. They like their teachers who, they say, 'make our learning interesting and fun'. Pupils are confident and happy to talk to adults. They know and understand the school's values such as resilience and respect. They told inspectors: 'We celebrate differences here. We don't make fun of others, we are friendly, and everyone is safe.'
- Pupils enjoy contributing to the school through taking on additional roles such as members of the school council, house captains and cloakroom monitors. Pupils understand that these roles develop their own confidence and organisational skills.
- Pupils have a good understanding of what constitutes bullying. Pupils told inspectors that bullying is rare. They said that if bullying does happen the teachers will sort it out quickly.
- The school prepares pupils well for the next stage in their education. Careful attention is given to supporting pupils as they move from the early years into key stage 1 and then into key stage 2. Year 4 pupils are confident and curious learners. They are able to organise themselves and make good decisions about what they need to do to be successful learners.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They are polite and courteous and show consideration for one another as they move around the school. At breaktimes, pupils make good use of the games and equipment the school provides. They play well together. Disagreements are rare and, when they do occur, pupils know that adults are available to help. In the dining hall, pupils are well mannered and sociable.
- Pupils often display a helpful attitude towards each other. For example, Year 4 pupils undertake the role of 'learning ambassadors', supporting children in Reception with their learning or being good role models.
- The school's behaviour policy and procedures are applied consistently across the school. Pupils regularly refer to 'the Lanchester way', making sure they are 'quiet and calm' as they move around the school.
- School records confirm that incidents of poor behaviour are few and, even so, leaders still work to reduce them even further.
- Leaders have worked hard to promote the importance of good attendance with pupils and their families, including those pupils who are disadvantaged. Staff closely monitor why pupils are absent and follow up concerns with parents quickly. As a result,

attendance rates are improving and overall attendance for the school is broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils who regularly miss school is also reducing and, although still high, is moving nearer to the national average.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Leaders' actions to improve teaching, learning and assessment have ensured that current pupils' progress and attainment are improving. During the inspection, observations of teaching and learning and careful examination of pupils' work in books over time found that throughout current year groups, most pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics from their different starting points.
- In 2018, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check was below the national average. Leaders have reviewed the school's approach to phonics teaching over the past year. As a result, most pupils in key stage 1 are developing a more secure understanding of the sounds letters make and phonics outcomes are improving rapidly.
- In 2018, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 was broadly average. Evidence in pupils' books and the school's assessment information show that the progress of current pupils is positive, and attainment is rising.
- By the end of Year 4, pupils have made good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' attainment in these subjects is broadly at or above the standards expected for their age.
- Pupils with SEND receive effective and timely support. The good management of this provision ensures that teachers and learning support partners plan and provide the right programmes and additional teaching for pupils. As a result, these pupils make strong progress from their various starting points.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is positive and improving. Since the previous inspection, leaders have made more precise and effective use of the additional funding for these pupils. As a result, the difference in attainment between these pupils and other pupils nationally is diminishing.
- In all year groups, teachers successfully meet the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Pupils with little or no acquisition of English receive targeted support to help them to improve their speaking skills quickly, for example by checking that they understand new vocabulary as soon as it is introduced. Consequently, these pupils make at least similar progress to their English-speaking peers.
- Pupils have many opportunities to practise literacy and mathematical skills through their topic work. Pupils' work on display and in their books shows that most groups make good progress in a wide range of subjects, including science, history, geography and art. However, in key stage 1, the quality and quantity of pupils' writing varies across all subjects.



## Early years provision

Good

- Children join early years with knowledge and skills that are broadly typical for their age, although some children are below in communication and literacy skills. Through good provision in the Reception classes, most children achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. Consequently, most children are well prepared for moving to Year 1.
- The early years leader is keen and enthusiastic. She has benefited from training and support provided by a local authority early years adviser and has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development.
- Children's starting points are assessed accurately when they join the Reception classes. This helps staff to provide any additional support needed, including to develop communication and language skills for those children who speak English as an additional language.
- Staff form positive relationships with children. This ensures that children settle into school life and learn the school's rules and routines quickly. During their time in early years, children develop good attitudes to learning. They listen carefully to staff and other children during group activities. They also show good levels of concentration when working on their own or with their friends.
- Safeguarding is equally effective in early years as it is throughout the rest of the school. Staff show great care for the children in their charge.
- Following recent staff training, the teaching of phonics is increasingly effective. Teachers model the links between letters and sounds and encourage children to learn these. Most children use their phonic knowledge to read simple words and form sentences when writing.
- Staff make regular observations of children's progress and tailor future activities to each child's next steps in learning. They record each child's development clearly and share the information with parents. Parents are positive about the early years provision. Leaders provide a range of events to encourage parents to understand how they can support their children's learning at home.
- Teachers ensure that children have opportunities to engage both in activities led by staff and tasks that they can choose for themselves. However, when working independently, the learning environment does not offer children a consistently good range of experiences in all areas of learning, or enough opportunities to select resources in order to follow their own interests and explore their own ideas.

## School details

Unique reference number	140954
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10103376

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	256
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Interim chair	Martin Glick
Principal	John Dibdin
Telephone number	01923 224 160
Website	<a href="http://www.lanchestercfs.org.uk">www.lanchestercfs.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@lanchestercfs.org.uk">office@lanchestercfs.org.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	16–17 May 2017

## Information about this school

- Lanchester Community Free School opened in September 2014 with children in the Reception classes only. Pupils have now moved up through the school into key stage 2. In September 2019, the school's first cohort of pupils will move into Year 5. The full complement of pupils through to Year 6 will be complete by 2020.
- Since the school opened, pupil and staff numbers have been growing. The school is currently smaller than the average-sized primary school although its capacity is larger. Pupils come from a diverse range of educational experiences and backgrounds.
- The school is part of the West Herts Schools Trust. The trust delegates aspects of governance to the local governing body. The board of trustees is the accountable body.
- The proportion of pupils whose first language is not believed to be English is well above the national average.

- The proportion of pupils eligible for support through the government's pupil premium funding is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is broadly in line with the national average. The proportion who have an education, health and care plan is below the national average.
- The current principal joined the school in April 2018. He is a local leader of education and provides a range of school-to-school support including coaching and mentoring for other headteachers.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been several changes to the senior and middle leadership teams.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited all classrooms to observe teaching, pupils' learning and behaviour. On most occasions, they were joined by the principal.
- A wide range of pupils' workbooks were examined by the inspectors throughout the inspection.
- Meetings were held with the principal, who is also one of the designated safeguarding leaders, the assistant principal, the school business manager, the SENCo, the early years leader, and several subject leaders.
- The lead inspector met with four governors, including the chair of the local governing body. In addition, the lead inspector met with the trust's chief executive officer and a local authority officer to discuss their work with the school.
- The inspectors spoke to pupils informally in class, and around the school at break and lunchtimes, to seek their views about the school. Meetings were also held with two groups of pupils more formally to discuss their learning and many aspects of school life. One of the inspectors attended a whole-school assembly.
- Some pupils were heard reading their books. The inspectors also talked to pupils about their reading habits and looked at their reading records.
- The school's website and a range of school documents were scrutinised, including assessment information, minutes from the local governing body meetings, the school's own evaluation, improvement plans, and records about safeguarding and attendance.
- The inspectors considered the 110 responses made by parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the 82 responses to the Ofsted free-text system. The inspectors also spoke to some parents at the start of the school day and during the inspection. They considered the emails and letters received from parents. Additionally, the inspectors took account of the 30 responses to the school's own recent staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's online staff or pupil surveys.

## Inspection team

Fiona Webb, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lou Nelson

Ofsted Inspector

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