

Inspection of an outstanding school: Larchwood Primary School

Larchwood Gardens, Pilgrims Hatch, Brentwood, Essex CM15 9NG

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 September 2022

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Larchwood Primary is a happy school. Pupils say how much they enjoy their time there. They describe it as a safe and supportive place. Pupils say bullying is rare and that leaders resolve any issues swiftly. Parents are highly positive about the education their children receive. A typical comment described the 'genuine sense of care for each student from all members of staff'.

Behaviour is very purposeful. Pupils respond well to leaders' high expectations and clear routines. Children in early years quickly learn to be orderly. Pupils practise their 'smart walking' calmly as they move around the school. They are enthusiastic about their learning. Year 4 pupils describe their science experiments with excitement. However, because of occasional inconsistencies in teaching, pupils do not always understand the curriculum as well as they could.

Pupils experience many opportunities. A high proportion go to clubs, such as girls' football, mindfulness, choir and origami. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) won a recent local sporting competition. Pupils use the school's values in everything they do. They develop a mature understanding of what it means to be different from others. By Year 6, pupils are articulate, confident and ready for secondary school.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has grown considerably in size over recent years. Leaders have managed most of this change successfully. Standards of behaviour and the quality of personal development have remained high. However, leaders still have some work to do in ensuring the curriculum is put in place as effectively as it might be. Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum, but subject leaders are not fully confident in checking

that it is delivered how leaders intend. Because of this, teachers, on occasion, plan learning activities less effectively, and this impacts on how well pupils learn.

Leaders have planned the curriculum in detail. They have identified the knowledge they want pupils to learn. Leaders aim for all pupils' learning to build up from the early years towards aspirational end points. For example, children in early years learn how to use a computer keyboard and Year 6 pupils learn complex coding. This helps pupils to be ready for their next stage of learning, including those with SEND.

Reading gets a high priority. There is a strong focus on the love of reading. Pupils talk with pleasure about the ambitious texts they read.

Leaders plan phonics well. Teachers know how to deliver this effectively. In the early years, staff make sure children have the knowledge they need to learn new sounds. Leaders assess regularly who is falling behind. If pupils need it, they get quick and ample support to catch up. Leaders check closely that pupils read books that match the sounds they already know. Parents get a lot of support to help their children learn to read. As a result, pupils quickly learn to read with fluency.

Teachers mostly deliver the curriculum effectively. They have appropriate subject knowledge. In many cases, pupils remember their learning and achieve well. For example, they develop confidence with reading comprehension and mathematical reasoning. While this is so, on occasion, teachers check learning less well than they might. When this happens, pupils sometimes move on to the next content without fully understanding the prior learning they need.

Pupils with SEND receive effective support to access the curriculum. Staff know how to adapt their teaching so pupils with SEND understand it. If pupils with SEND need extra support, such as with speech and language, leaders ensure they get it. Therefore, these pupils build up their knowledge as well as their peers.

Leaders have developed a very clear behaviour policy. Staff are well trained in putting this in place. This helps pupils to behave well.

Pupils get a lot of support with their mental health and well-being. Leaders check carefully how vulnerable pupils are coping. Pupils learn about resilience. For example, they talk knowledgeably about how staying healthy helps you feel better.

Staff are very positive about the leadership of the school. They say that leaders adapt processes to lighten their workload. This supports staff well-being and motivation.

The trust has worked effectively with leaders to sustain the quality of provision, in areas such as safeguarding and behaviour. Where improvement is needed, such as in training and supporting subject leaders, the trust has already started this. Governors are knowledgeable. They ask leaders probing questions, for instance exploring the quality of teaching.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The safeguarding culture is robust. Staff are well trained in spotting and reporting concerns. Leaders ensure concerns are logged and dealt with thoroughly. Safeguarding records show that leaders act effectively to support children who are at risk of harm. When leaders need to make referrals, they do this promptly. Leaders understand local risks and work well with families.

Children learn how to stay safe. They know a lot about online safety, such as about privacy, viruses, scams and appropriate caution. The strong pastoral care and inclusive culture help pupils to feel safe. Children feel safe, and parents and staff agree.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Not all subject leaders are as confident as they might be in monitoring the implementation of the curriculum. This means that sometimes they do not know where teachers need more help to deliver and assess learning effectively. Leaders need to ensure that subject leaders get the training they need so they know how to check that the ambitious curriculum is being put in place as well as intended.
- Sometimes teachers do not check as effectively as they could how well pupils understand what they learn. As a result, pupils on occasion move on to new content with gaps in their knowledge. Leaders should make sure teachers get sufficient training so that they know how to assess learning effectively, to ensure that pupils have the secure prior knowledge they need as they learn new content.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in March 2017.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	140828
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10242498
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	418
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Helen Witty
Headteacher	Stephen Bowsheer
Website	www.larchwoodprimary.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	7 and 8 March 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has grown from a one-form entry to a two-form entry over time. At the previous inspection the number on roll was 252. It is now 418.
- The school is part of the Discovery Educational Trust.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2020, having been the deputy headteacher.
- The previous headteacher became the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust in September 2020.
- The chair of trustees was appointed on 1 September 2021.
- The chair of governors was appointed on 1 September 2021.
- Leaders use one registered alternative provider.
- There is a breakfast club and an after-school club, both managed by the school on site.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation.
- The inspector held meetings with the CEO, senior leaders, other leaders, staff and pupils.
- The inspector met with the chair of the trust and the chair of the local school committee to discuss governance.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and computing. For each deep dive, the inspector met with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. In early reading, this took the form of listening to pupils read to a familiar adult.
- As part of the evaluation of the school's safeguarding processes, the inspector reviewed the school's single central record, met with the designated safeguarding lead, and looked at the recording of safeguarding information.
- The inspector reviewed a range of school documents, including the school self-evaluation form and improvement plan, curriculum plans and school policies.
- The inspector reviewed the 116 responses that were submitted by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and also considered the 65 free-text responses from parents. The inspector also considered 26 responses to the Ofsted staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Charlie Fordham, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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