

Inspection of Larwood School

Larwood Drive, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG1 5BZ

Inspection dates: 9 and 10 November 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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| The quality of education | Good |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Outstanding |
| Personal development | Good |
| Leadership and management | Good |
| Previous inspection grade | Good |

What is it like to attend this school?

The school is a happy and safe place to learn. Larwood pupils settle in quickly, often after extended periods of disruption to their previous education. They trust their teachers and other adults because staff take time to get to know everyone's interests and needs. This happens even before pupils join the school.

Pupils are encouraged to read regularly and supported to catch up. They make huge strides in improving their behaviour and attendance. This is because they know what is expected of them from the outset and rise to the challenge of the high expectations set. They enjoy their learning across a wide range of subjects, including opportunities to gain important life skills such as cooking and swimming.

Physical education and lunchtime games help pupils to keep healthy. Everyone is included. The importance of making good choices and being kind to each other is well promoted. Bullying is rare and sorted out quickly if it happens. Exciting events, for example 'Larwood's Got Talent', the Christmas production and singing out in the community allow pupils to showcase their performance skills. Educational visits, such as trips to the theatre, museums and to different places of worship, bring learning to life.

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

Leaders, including the trust, want the best for Larwood School pupils. The curriculum gets pupils successfully back on track with their learning, including in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans are used effectively and reviewed regularly. High-quality support meets pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs from the outset. This means that pupils settle in quickly and are ready to learn.

Pupils experience a broad and interesting curriculum. Leaders think carefully about what needs to be taught at different stages in each subject. Learning is mostly well planned to build on what pupils already know. Teachers revisit important knowledge to help pupils apply it to new situations. While the quality of education is effective overall, the small steps linked to the important content that pupils need to learn are not always clear enough. Learning targets can sometimes be too broad, rather than pinpointing exactly what pupils need to do to move on quickly.

Many older pupils join the school unable to read. Over time, they gain confidence and improve their reading accuracy and fluency. Phonics are taught daily in every year group. A new reading scheme has been introduced recently. Leaders are checking to make sure that all pupils in the early stages of learning to read get the precise support they need. Leaders ensure that books are consistently matched well to the sounds that they are learning.

Pupils' response to leaders' high expectations of behaviour is impressive. Staff are appropriately trained and so they are skilled in defusing any potentially challenging situations. Pupils learn to regulate their own behaviour exceptionally well. Older pupils explain confidently how their behaviour has improved since they joined the school. Pupils understand the routines and learn quickly to respect the boundaries set. Classrooms are typically purposeful and calm places to learn. Pupils trust the staff who work with them and so they feel safe. Parents are highly positive about the difference the school makes to their child's behaviour and family life.

Pupils are expected to be kind to each other. They learn how to form positive relationships with others. Pupils show tolerance and respect for individual differences through the well-considered personal, social and health education curriculum and themed assemblies.

The middle leadership team is still developing. A few subject leads are new to the role. They are still being trained to evaluate precisely the quality of the provision in their areas of responsibility.

The recently formed trust board reflects a wide range of skills. Trustees act to ensure that they have the expertise they need to challenge and support school leaders effectively.

Staff share leaders' and trustees' ambitious vision for all pupils. They are proud of their school and feel well supported.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a well-established culture of safeguarding across the school. The members of the safeguarding team are skilled and experienced. Staff are well trained and know what to do if they suspect a pupil may be at risk of harm.

Wide-ranging support networks, including through the school's onsite mental health support and therapy teams, ensure that pupils and their families get prompt help when they need it.

All the required checks are completed on new staff before they join the school.

Pupils are taught how to make good decisions about their well-being and safety, including when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders do not always know how effectively pupils are learning because the detail of the curriculum content is not consistently well defined in some subjects.

Learning targets can sometimes be too broad, which means that pupils are not always provided with the precise help they need to learn the curriculum as well as they could. Leaders must ensure that all staff are confident to define the detail of the important content that pupils need to learn, while providing access to any further training needed so that pupils achieve equally well in all subjects.

- The school's wider leadership team is still developing. Some subject leaders are new and so capacity to consolidate and build on the implementation of curriculum improvements is still being established. Senior leaders should ensure that new leaders have the skills they need to evaluate the provision in their areas of responsibility. This is so that monitoring and review processes are consistent in identifying what is working well and what needs to improve further.

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

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| Unique reference number | 143604 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10241275 |
| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Academy special converter |
| Age range of pupils | 5 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 91 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair | Daniel Login |
| Headteacher | Pierre van der Merwe |
| Website | www.larwood.herts.sch.uk |
| Dates of previous inspection | 9 and 10 October 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Larwood Academy Trust.
- Education is provided for pupils aged between 5 and 11 years.
- The provision caters for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those related to autism spectrum disorder.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. They join the school at different points during the year and at different stages of their education.
- Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher and chief executive officer of the trust have been appointed.
- The current headteacher was previously Larwood School's deputy headteacher.
- The board of trustees has oversight of provision at this school, as well as provision at another school in the trust.
- The school does not use alternative education provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: reading, English, mathematics, history and science. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and other staff. They spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed safeguarding and associated policies and the record of pre-employment checks on adults at the school. The lead inspector also considered a sample of child protection files, spoke with trustees, leaders and staff about safeguarding arrangements in place.
- Telephone meetings were held with a representative from the local authority, the school's improvement partner and a senior leader commissioning outreach provision from the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with pupils, the headteacher and deputy headteacher, the school's family support worker, subject leaders, other staff, governors, members of the trust board, including the chair and chief executive officer.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including behaviour and attendance records, meeting notes, the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans.
- There were 10 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View. These were considered alongside seven free-text responses from parents and 31 responses to the questionnaire for school staff.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils. However, inspectors spoke with individuals and small groups of pupils during the inspection to gather their views.

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Daniel Short

His Majesty's Inspector

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