

Inspection of Lotus School

Langdale Road, Blackpool, Lancashire FY4 4RR

Inspection dates:

30 November to 1 December 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Inadequate

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are not safe in this school. They are unhappy. Some staff and parents and carers share this view.

Pupils' behaviour is poor in lessons and at social times. At times, pupils' behaviour can be dangerous and intimidating. Leaders and staff do not routinely demonstrate high expectations for pupils' conduct. Leaders have not ensured that staff have the skills that they need to improve pupils' complex behaviours.

Pupils experience bullying and derogatory language often. Some pupils reported that leaders act quickly and effectively to stop this reoccurring. Yet other pupils, including those with learning difficulties, continue to experience serious bullying. Staff do not deal with these issues successfully.

Leaders want pupils to succeed, but they have not ensured that pupils achieve well across many subjects, including reading. The curriculum does not provide pupils with suitable opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills that they need. Staff do not adapt their teaching to meet pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Some pupils enjoy using the on-site gym and raising money for local charities. They told inspectors about baking cakes to sell for charity. They benefit from activities such as music workshops and visits. However, most pupils receive a limited offer beyond the academic curriculum. Pupils do not receive a curriculum that prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

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

All pupils at this school have SEND. Many are disadvantaged and vulnerable. Often, pupils have experienced significant disruption to their education. The standard of education that pupils receive does not meet their needs well. Pupils' education has been further affected by recruitment difficulties, resulting in a lack of stable staffing.

Leaders have established a broad curriculum. Pupils can work towards qualifications in some subjects. However, because leaders have not considered pupils' individual needs well enough, the curriculum does not enable them to achieve well. Leaders' ambition for pupils' success is not realised.

Leaders and teachers do not identify pupils' starting points well enough. This results in teachers and staff delivering the same curriculum content to all pupils, regardless of their varying needs and prior experiences. Pupils, therefore, experience a curriculum that is not fit for purpose.

Pupils do not revisit their prior learning, nor do they have the opportunity to relearn missed or forgotten knowledge. This means that they cannot build new knowledge securely. Pupils do not develop a deep understanding of the knowledge that they

need for their future learning. For some pupils, the struggle to access the curriculum leads to frustration and a decline in their conduct.

Leaders have not prioritised the teaching of reading. Some pupils can read with confidence and fluency. Many cannot. Pupils at an early stage of reading do not benefit from a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics. Staff have not received suitable training to support pupils who find reading difficult. Pupils do not receive regular, specific and useful guidance to develop their reading skills and knowledge. This makes it even more difficult for them to access their learning in other subjects.

Leaders engage with specialists to provide additional support for pupils. Leaders challenge agencies when the necessary support is not forthcoming. However, pupils do not receive the provision identified in specialist reports or in their education, health and care (EHC) plans. Leaders have not established an agreed approach to the delivery of this support. This means that too much is left to chance. Therefore, some pupils receive adequate support, but many do not. Leaders do not check the impact of the support that pupils receive. Leaders cannot celebrate successes or identify pupils' possible emerging or changing SEND accurately.

Routines are lax. At times, staff do not supervise pupils well enough. As a result, pupils move around school in a disruptive and threatening way. They bang on doors, run down corridors and stairwells, and kick walls and windows. This causes risk of injury and damage to equipment and the school building.

Leaders allow pupils to be disrespectful to adults and other pupils. Some staff have been injured by pupils. This impacts negatively on pupils' and staff's well-being. Serious and disruptive behaviour regularly spoils the learning of those pupils who try hard to concentrate in class. Leaders do not ensure that staff apply the behaviour policy and strategies as they should. Leaders do not provide effective support to help pupils improve their conduct.

Pupils in Year 7 respond well to structured routines when they are in class. This environment is calm and well organised. However, the behaviour of older pupils regularly upsets these younger pupils.

Pupils do not receive their entitlement to personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education or religious education (RE). Leaders have not fulfilled their statutory duty to consult with parents about the content of the proposed RSE and health curriculum. Some pupils receive aspects of PSHE and RE. For example, some pupils could recall information about world religions. However, pupils' knowledge of different faiths, fundamental British values, such as tolerance and democracy, and important topics, such as consent, is not as developed as it should be. Pupils are ill-prepared for adulthood.

Leaders have not established an effective programme of careers education, information, advice and guidance. Some pupils receive work experience

opportunities that are linked to their aspirations. For example, some pupils benefit from working in the sports or hospitality sectors. However, pupils do not receive any formal careers education. Consequently, they lack the skills and understanding required to move successfully to their next stages in education, employment or training.

Some staff reported concerns about their workload and well-being. However, most staff believe that leaders are approachable and consider their workload carefully.

Trustees and governors have not ensured that pupils benefit from a safe and secure environment where they experience a high-quality education. Consequently, those responsible for governance do not meet several statutory duties. Leaders, governors and trustees recognise that pupils deserve better. They have started to address some of the considerable shortcomings at the school. However, they have not acted with enough urgency or focused on the right priorities. The impact of leaders' work on improving pupils' education and welfare is limited.

Parents' views of the school are mixed. Some appreciate the support, advice and guidance that their child receives. Others are troubled about their child's education and welfare.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders and those responsible for governance have not established a strong culture of safeguarding. Many pupils experience intimidation because of the actions of other pupils. This means that they do not feel safe in school.

Pupils wander around school when they should be in lessons. They frequently try to leave the school site. Some succeed. Leaders have a suitable policy for when this occurs. However, staff do not follow this policy as intended. This puts pupils further at risk of harm.

Some pupils have learned about online safety and the dangers of drugs. However, there is no systematic teaching of PSHE or RSE and health education. This means that pupils, many who are vulnerable, do not develop a suitable knowledge of the dangers that they may face in society.

Some pupils are not protected well enough from bullying. Some pupils target pupils with learning difficulties and use derogatory language towards them. As a result, these pupils suffer in school. They are unhappy and victimised.

Leaders have not ensured that the designated safeguarding leads are suitably qualified. This limits their ability to help pupils stay safe.

Leaders have a suitable knowledge of safer recruitment procedures. They carry out the checks that they should on adults working at the school. Leaders check that alternative provision is safe before pupils attend with a member of staff.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not ensured that there is a positive culture of safeguarding in the school. Some pupils abscond. Some pupils are victims of discriminatory bullying. Many pupils feel unsafe due to the intimidating behaviour of other pupils. Leaders must act urgently to ensure that a strong culture of safeguarding is established and that pupils are safe and feel safe in school.
- Leaders have not established a curriculum that meets pupils' SEND. Staff do not routinely adapt their teaching well enough so that pupils access the curriculum well. Leaders do not provide suitable provision, such as that outlined in pupils' EHC plans or specialist reports. As a result, pupils receive an inappropriate curriculum and they do not achieve as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is well designed to meet pupils' SEND and that teachers adapt their teaching so that pupils can access the curriculum effectively.
- Leaders have no strategic approach to the teaching of early reading. Staff have not received suitable training to support pupils at the early stages of reading. This means that pupils do not catch up as quickly as they should. Leaders should ensure that a systematic programme for the teaching of early reading is introduced and that staff deliver this programme competently.
- Leaders have not established high expectations for pupils' behaviour and conduct. Leaders and staff do not implement strategies to improve behaviour consistently well. Staff do not have the skills and knowledge that they need to improve pupils' behaviour. Consequently, serious and challenging behaviour puts pupils at risk of harm and regularly disrupts the learning of others. Leaders should ensure that all staff develop the competence and confidence to deliver an effective behaviour policy.
- Leaders have not ensured that pupils receive suitable careers education, information, advice and guidance, PSHE or RE. Leaders have not adopted or consulted parents on a suitable RSE and health education policy and curriculum. This means that pupils do not develop the rich knowledge that they need for life beyond school. Leaders should ensure that pupils receive effective PSHE, RSE and health education, RE and careers education, information, advice and guidance that includes all statutory requirements so that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Governors and trustees have not held leaders to account well enough. This has resulted in statutory responsibilities not being fulfilled. These include safeguarding being ineffective and pupils with SEND, including many who are disadvantaged, not receiving their entitlement to a high-quality education. Governors and

trustees should ensure that they hold leaders to account more effectively to urgently improve the quality of education and welfare that pupils receive.

Having considered the evidence, we strongly recommend that leaders and those responsible for governance do not seek to appoint early careers teachers.

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	147845
Local authority	Blackpool
Inspection number	10255941
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	10 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	39
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Dot Thomson
Headteacher	Melanie Kelsall
Website	www.lotusschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Lotus School opened in September 2020.
- The school provides education for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Many pupils have additional learning difficulties, including communication and interaction, and cognition and learning needs. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- There have been significant changes to staffing at the school. This includes the appointment of a substantive headteacher in September 2021 and two assistant headteachers from September 2022. A significant proportion of teaching and support staff have been appointed since September 2022.
- The school is part of the Champion Education Trust. A new trustee was appointed to the board in September 2022. A leader from the trust works in the school two days a week.
- The chair of governors was appointed in September 2022.
- Leaders make use of one registered and four unregistered alternative providers.
- The school does not meet the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

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

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- 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 completed deep dives in these subjects: English, including early reading, science and history. They met with subject leaders, visited some lessons, reviewed pupils' work and spoke to teachers and pupils. The lead inspector listened to pupils reading to trusted staff.
- Inspectors also met with the leaders for other subjects, reviewed pupils' work, met with subject leaders and evaluated the curriculums.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation. The lead inspector spoke to the headteacher, senior leaders and leaders from the Champion Education Trust throughout the inspection.
- The lead inspector spoke with the chair of the governing body by telephone. He also met remotely with the chief executive officer from the Champion Education Trust. The lead inspector spoke with the chair of the Champion Education Trust by telephone.
- The lead inspector spoke to representatives from the local authority by telephone.
- The lead inspector spoke to staff at three unregistered alternative providers by telephone.
- The lead inspector spoke to a consultant, used by leaders, from a Department for Education behaviour hub by telephone.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the staff responsible for safeguarding and scrutinised the single central record. Inspectors considered leaders' safeguarding processes and procedures. They observed pupils during lessons, breaktimes and lunchtimes. Inspectors discussed safeguarding with pupils and staff.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Adam Sproston, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Elaine Parkinson

Ofsted Inspector

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