

Inspection of Larkspur Academy

Tower Road, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 7LP

Inspection dates: 11 and 12 January 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Larkspur Academy is a warm and welcoming school where pupils are happy and enjoy their learning.

Expectations of pupils to learn and achieve as well as they can are high. Pupils' best interests are at the heart of everything.

Pupils are kind and considerate towards each other. They learn about important values such as care, honesty and appreciation. They behave well in lessons and around the school. Pupils know that learning is important, so they work hard. They enjoy the regular assemblies which celebrate their achievements.

Pupils know how to stay safe, including when they are online. They use their 'network hands' to remind them who they can go to if they have any worries. Pupils are confident that staff really care about them and will always help them. Those who find school more difficult are supported sensitively. On the rare occasions that bullying happens, pupils say that staff deal with it well.

Following the pandemic, pupils are starting to benefit again from visits to places of interest and other activities in school, including clubs and sports events. They enjoy these opportunities outside lessons.

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

Leaders understand the needs of their pupils. Their clear and ambitious expectations mean that all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well. Leaders' highly effective work means this is a rapidly improving school where every pupil really does matter.

Leaders have developed a broad and well-designed curriculum. This has been carefully adapted for the mixed-age classes in the school. Pupils develop key subject knowledge and skills in sensible steps. Detailed curriculum plans help teachers to design lessons that meet pupils' needs.

Teachers have strong subject expertise in most areas. Where this is not fully the case, leaders provide sharply focused and effective coaching so that teachers become confident to teach concepts clearly. Pupils appreciate the regular individual feedback conversations they have with their teachers. These help pupils to remember most of what they are taught.

Leaders prioritise early reading. All staff receive effective training and support to deliver the phonics programme well. Children in the early years make a very positive start. They quickly learn to blend sounds into words. Pupils who fall behind are given regular and tailored support to catch up. This means that, over time, they learn to read fluently. Leaders ensure the reading books closely match the sounds pupils know.

Pupils across the school read high-quality texts as a class. Lessons across the curriculum, including in early years, ensure pupils develop a wide vocabulary. Leaders make sure that pupils regularly read books from the well-resourced library. As a result, most pupils enjoy their reading and talk enthusiastically about their favourite stories.

Early years is very well led. Children enjoy a well-equipped environment which contributes towards them learning well. They are able to choose enthusiastically from a wide range of activities designed to help them learn new skills. Leaders use assessment to swiftly identify and address gaps in children's learning. Leaders have linked the early years curriculum carefully to subjects in the rest of the school. This means children are well prepared for Year 1.

Staff apply the behaviour policy consistently. Pupils understand the high expectations that leaders have of them to behave well. This contributes towards the calm, positive learning environment throughout the school. The playground is a vibrant space where pupils enjoy being active together.

Leaders work closely with pupils and their families to remove barriers that prevent pupils from attending well. Leaders know that some pupils still do not attend school as often as they should, and as a result, do not make the progress they could. However, leaders regularly review what they do and check what difference it makes to continue to improve attendance.

Teachers have detailed information about the needs of pupils with SEND. They use this to improve provision and adapt plans appropriately to meet pupils' needs. Other adults provide bespoke support to individuals and groups. As a result, pupils with SEND achieve well.

Leaders promote pupils' wider development very well. Pupils learn to look after their emotional health and keep safe online. Leaders ensure that pupils learn to be respectful and to accept differences. They are taught about relationships and different types of families. Pupils talk confidently about the school's values and how they model them.

The trust leaders and governors have worked very effectively with leaders to improve the school. Leaders, trustees and governors all know what is working and what they need to improve. The trust has provided tailored support for leaders and staff. Staff feel valued and appreciate leaders' support for their well-being and workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that pupils' safety are a priority for everyone. All adults are regularly trained in safeguarding. They are highly alert to the risks pupils may face and know

how to report any concerns. Detailed safeguarding records show that leaders take prompt and effective action when concerns are raised. They work tirelessly with parents to help the most vulnerable pupils and their families get the support they need.

Leaders have ensured that appropriate safer recruitment checks have been carried out.

Pupils access curriculum content that ensures pupils learn how to stay safe, including when online and when outside of school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not have strong enough subject expertise in all curriculum areas. This means that the planned curriculum is not implemented consistently and effectively across all subjects and year groups. Leaders should continue to provide focused professional development for classroom teachers to improve their subject expertise across the full range of subjects.
- The attendance of some pupils is still not as good as it should be. This means some pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding because they were not in school when aspects of the curriculum were taught. Leaders should continue to work closely with families, particularly for those pupils with more extended periods of absence, to ensure that pupils' individual attendance improves.

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	146359
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10254985
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	113
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Deborah Thompson
Headteacher	Kerry McEwan
Website	www.larkspurprimary.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school has a breakfast club on site and runs an after-school club.
- Leaders do not use any alternative provision.
- Larkspur Academy became an academy in September 2018 as part of the Ivy Learning Trust. When its predecessor school, Tower Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted in March 2017, it was judged to be inadequate overall.

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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, and other senior and middle leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer and the chair and vice-chair of trustees for the Ivy Learning Trust. He also met with four local

governors, including the chair of the local governing body, and held a telephone conversation with the local authority school improvement partner.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and pupils, looked at samples of pupils' work, and listened to a number of pupils read to a familiar adult. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects, particularly history and geography.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons. Inspectors met with groups of pupils and also took into account pupils' responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- To inspect safeguarding, the lead inspector scrutinised safeguarding policies, the school's single central record of background checks on adults at the school, and a sample of child protection records. Inspectors also spoke with governors, leaders, staff and pupils about safeguarding practices at the school.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of other documentation, including attendance records, school policies, leaders' evaluations and development plans, and records concerning pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors met with members of staff to discuss the school's work and considered responses to the confidential Ofsted staff survey. They also looked at parents' responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and free-text responses.

Inspection team

John Constable, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Mark Sim

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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