

Larches House School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119112
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	313189
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2008
Reporting inspector	John Atkinson

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	120
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Bisby
Headteacher	Mr Alan Banes
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2005
School address	Larches Lane Ashton-on-Ribble Preston Lancashire PR2 1QE
Telephone number	01772 728567
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Larches House school caters for up to 120 pupils who have been excluded from mainstream schools. Up to 56 can be accommodated on site. There are a small number of pupils in Year 8 and the vast majority are in Years 9, 10 and 11. A significant number have had previously negative experiences of education, many have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and 10 have a statement of special educational needs because of their social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school provides education on site with vocational and educational training provided off site in partnership with a range of other organisations. A number of pupils receive support from the school through its tuition centre and distance learning programme and a small number of pupils attend a further education college. The pupils are predominantly White British and no pupils speak English as an additional language. Nine pupils are in public care. Attainment on entry is well below average because many pupils have missed a considerable amount of schooling through poor attendance and/or exclusion from mainstream schools. A high proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Larches House is a good and improving school that has made significant progress since its last inspection. It is effectively led and managed and has a good capacity to improve further. It has a good reputation with parents who openly acknowledge the improvements in their children's behaviour, attitudes and achievements and are therefore happy to send them to the school. As one parent commented, 'My child who hated school now wants to stay on. The staff do a fantastic job and should be proud'. Pupils' positive engagement with the school's activities illustrates a significant change from their previous negative attitudes towards learning and demonstrates how much they have grown in self-confidence.

The good leadership of the headteacher is the driving force behind the effective provision. Working in partnership with other senior staff, he has developed a clear vision for the school and a sense of unity amongst staff. Staff are encouraged to be reflective in their work, so that they have a commitment to improve and are highly motivated. As a result, there is a very positive ethos running throughout all aspects of the school's work, ensuring that its vision of providing a 'safe, secure and welcoming learning environment' is a daily reality for all pupils. The outcome is that pupils make good personal progress in behaving more sensibly and maturely and by taking learning more seriously.

Teaching is good and leads to pupils enjoying learning, making good progress and achieving well. Although standards are well below average, many pupils do far better than was expected when they first joined the school. This is because of the intensive support and encouragement given by all staff. As a result, pupils gain passes in GCSEs and other accredited courses as well as acquiring vital social skills and relevant vocational experiences that pupils value. Currently there is no whole-school system for tracking and monitoring pupil progress and strategies to uncover any potential underachievement are not fully understood by all staff. Teachers assess pupils' work regularly but do not consistently use the information to set clear learning targets and pupils are not always sure of the steps they need to take to reach the next level in their learning. This contrasts sharply with the very clear advice that pupils are given about how to improve their behaviour, attitudes and social skills and these are the areas where pupils make rapid and sustained progress.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good because of the good provision for their care, guidance and support. Links with other agencies and the school's own initiatives, such as the individual tuition and mentoring programmes, provide imaginative solutions for each individual's complex needs and circumstances. Pupils develop increasingly positive attitudes and display considerable improvements in their behaviour and self-restraint as a result of the support they receive and the additional programmes such as anger management. The high quality relationships between pupils and adults sustain a very positive ethos where pupils feel safe, secure and at ease in sharing their anxieties and problems. The school provides a good diet for pupils and makes extensive efforts to inform pupils about the dangers of drugs and alcohol abuse. Attendance is satisfactory for the majority of pupils, which compares favourably with the poor attendance of most pupils in their previous schools.

The curriculum is good although the range of appropriate vocational courses is narrow because of the limited provision in the local authority. Pupils are only prepared satisfactorily for their future economic well-being. The available vocational curriculum is very popular and motivating for pupils. Pupils enjoy appropriate work experiences and this provision prepares them well for

the future. There is a wide range of additional opportunities, particularly in sport, the arts and outdoor education that broaden pupils' horizons and increase their engagement with learning. The outcome is that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and reflected in the pupils' improved levels of tolerance and respect for difference and each other's personal circumstances.

Leadership and management are good. The senior leadership team gives good support in developing new and inexperienced staff. The management committee is effective in supporting and challenging the headteacher in the promotion of a high quality personalised education. Senior staff are effective managers who ensure the thorough implementation of rigorous systems and routines that promote a positive ethos and a calm, purposeful learning environment. Subject leaders are effective in planning suitable learning activities but have limited experience in monitoring the standards and achievement in their subjects to ensure that pupils make the progress they are capable of.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers use assessment information to set challenging learning targets in all subjects.
- Give clear guidance to pupils about the action they need to take to improve their work and reach the next steps in their learning.
- Ensure that subject leaders effectively monitor and track the standards and pupils' progress in their subject.
- Extend the range of vocational courses available to pupils in Key Stage 4.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The majority of pupils join the centre with a history of underachievement and/or disruption, indifferent attitudes towards learning, poor attendance and a lack of self-confidence. They make particularly good progress in terms of improving their behaviour, developing the skills to better manage their emotions and in speaking and listening to others in a respectful and thoughtful manner. They also make good progress in their learning and, taking account of their prior attainment, achieve well. In Key Stage 3 pupils make good progress in English, mathematics and science. They develop a better understanding of the world around them through their citizenship course work and make good progress in information and communication technology (ICT) skills which are used well in other subjects such as art.

Pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve well in GCSEs in English, mathematics, art and Preparation for Working Life and in the accredited course in ICT. They also achieve well in Entry Level Certificates and in Princes Trust bronze, silver and gold awards. Pupils' artwork throughout the school is of a good quality and the achievements in physical education and outdoor education exceed previous expectations by a long way. Pupils achieve well in vocational courses in motor vehicle maintenance. Successes in work experience shows the good progress that pupils make in learning new skills that give them access to a variety of options when they reach school leaving age.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Overall, pupils' personal development is good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils enjoy the activities on offer, regain their enthusiasm for learning, grow in self-esteem and begin to believe in their own abilities. As a result, they become more socially skilled and develop good personal relationships with staff and pupils alike. This leads to them having higher expectations for themselves and increases their ambitions for the future. The staff's consistent implementation of routines and setting of very clear boundaries brings about huge improvements in pupils' attitudes and understanding of the consequences of their behaviour. There are effective procedures for improving attendance, resulting in improved attendance rates for most pupils. A minority of pupils remain poor attenders and good links with external agencies ensure these individuals are supported. Pupils feel very safe at school and are confident that they can share any worries or anxieties with staff. Pupils eat very healthily at school and regularly take part in physical exercise. Pupils make a good contribution to the wider community by their good participation in a wide range of sporting activities. The personal, social, health and citizenship education programme actively develops pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles and the outcome is that pupils are well informed about the choices they can make for themselves.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers and teaching assistants have good relationships with pupils and work effectively as a team to ensure that pupils receive sufficient support to overcome many of their difficulties. In the best teaching, lessons are well planned and structured and tasks are pitched at the appropriate level. Where teaching is no better than satisfactory it is often because the activities do not always challenge the full range of ability within the class. Pupils enjoy lessons, work hard and are keen to do well. Classrooms are well organised with stimulating displays and, as a result, there is a positive ethos that fosters an enthusiastic approach to learning and pride in the presentation of work. Teachers assess pupils regularly but do not consistently use this information to set clear and appropriate learning targets. Praise and rewards are used appropriately to recognise effort, progress and achievements. A significant strength is the manner in which staff manage challenging behaviour and engage pupils in discussions through skilful questioning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum and its enrichment are good and pupils have very good opportunities to participate in sporting and cultural activities such as football, golf, boxing, dance and music technology. These activities are influential in motivating pupils and widening their horizons with the effect that pupils develop a renewed sense of achievement and an appreciation of different cultures. The access to accredited courses in Key Stage 4 gives pupils the opportunities to gain qualifications that many had lost hope of achieving. The vocational courses and work experiences give pupils a real sense of purpose and an understanding of the essential skills needed to be a successful member of a team. However, the narrow range of courses available limits pupils' preparation for future employment, education and training opportunities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This is a safe, caring school where pupils feel valued and respected and secure in the knowledge that staff will provide support no matter how difficult the circumstances are. Staff give very clear and consistent guidance on how pupils should behave and manage their emotions. Several parents comment on the impact this has had on their children and how much it has improved the quality of life at home. Arrangements to safeguard pupils are very thorough and this means that the most vulnerable or at-risk pupils are quickly identified and supported. Child protection arrangements and those to ensure everyone's health, welfare and safety are in place. Pupils in public care receive excellent additional support to enable them to access the curriculum and make good progress. When teachers mark pupils' work they are very encouraging but do not give sufficient guidance as to how they could reach the next level in their learning and this means that there are missed opportunities to raise standards further.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher leads the school with drive, energy and purpose. His clear vision is fully shared by staff and pupils. As a result, there is a very positive ethos where pupils feel they are back on track and can see a brighter future for themselves. The senior leadership team have an accurate view of the centre's strengths and areas for development and are effective in supporting staff with good routines that result in a stable and secure environment. The management committee is involved well in the strategic direction and monitoring of the centre. The morale of the staff is high and professional development opportunities are good, resulting in the centre's good capacity to improve. However, subject leaders have limited experience in monitoring the standards and achievement in their subjects. The centre gives very good value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

15 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Larches House School, Lancashire, PR2 1QE

Thank you very much for making me so welcome when I came to visit Larches House. I enjoyed talking to you and listening to the good things that you had to say about the school. I was impressed by your behaviour and attitudes towards schoolwork. You all seemed to enjoy lessons and the other opportunities you are offered in school and were rightly very proud of your achievements since joining the school. I quickly discovered from discussions with you and the staff why you have done so much better in recent months and years.

- The headteacher makes sure that you have a really good learning environment with good facilities.
- The staff work very well as a team to look after you and are always prepared to listen and support you.
- You have many opportunities to follow courses in things that you are interested in as well as having many sporting activities available.
- You are expected to work hard and behave sensibly and maturely.

It is very clear that you are now more ambitious and confident than you were and staff and your parents are really pleased at how much improvement you have made and continue to make. I discussed with the headteacher how Larches House could improve and we agreed a number of points.

- You should always be set challenging targets and given clear guidance on how to reach them.
- Subject staff will monitor your progress carefully to ensure you achieve what you are capable of.
- The school will try to extend the vocational course for those of you in years 10 and 11.

However the most important thing is that you continue to be as positive, enthusiastic and optimistic as you were during my visit. I hope you all do well in your exams and wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Atkinson

Lead inspector