

Larkrise School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126553
Local Authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	340997
Inspection dates	20–21 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Frank Price

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	83
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	12
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robert Ham
Headteacher	Philip Cook
Date of previous school inspection	6 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 10 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of evidence, including data on pupils' progress, pupils' individual education programmes, teachers' planning, curriculum documents, safeguarding procedures, information on the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, and 38 responses from parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- whether all pupils, regardless of their ability and need, make enough progress
- how effectively the leadership and management of the school at all levels make improvements to the school's provision
- how well the teaching and learning meet the wide range of pupils' needs
- how effectively the curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of all pupils
- how the school uses assessment information to plan for improvement and set challenging targets.

Information about the school

Larkrise School educates pupils with a range of severe learning difficulties, including those children with visual and multi-sensory impairments. Some children also have an autistic spectrum disorder. These pupils are integrated into the school with specialist staff providing support. A number of pupils also have complex medical needs. The school takes pupils from a large catchment area, within a radius of approximately 15 miles. The socio-economic background of students varies widely. A new headteacher was appointed in April 2009.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Larkrise school provides a satisfactory quality of education. There are encouraging signs of rapid improvements, although these have yet to be firmly embedded into the fabric of the school. The new headteacher, together with the reorganised senior leadership team and determined governing body, is enthusiastic to seize the opportunity to make improvements. Staff are dedicated, positive and keen to implement developments and to raise standards. Views of the staff are strongly supportive of the changes and one commented on the 'dramatic change in recent months with increased communication, openness and progressive and exciting plans for the future; our school is a joy to work in'. Parents also are very supportive of the school and point to closer working relationships with parents, with increased opportunities for pupils to be involved in a wider range of activities as evidence of recent improvements.

Pupils' attainment is low, reflecting their special educational needs and disabilities, but they make satisfactory progress. The progress of post-16 students is good, as a result of good teaching. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children have complex needs, but satisfactorily make progress. The use of key workers to support individual pupils and the understanding of good early years provision by leaders is not developed well enough. Assessment procedures are not sufficiently developed to ensure that small steps in progress are noted and used to adapt future planning. The headteacher is also aware that progress for pupils needs improving through the use of more comprehensive assessment procedures, particularly for those pupils who make very small steps of progress, and that alternative methods of communication such as symbols, signs and photographs need to be used more consistently in lessons. Pupils' personal development is a strength. Given the needs of pupils, their behaviour is outstanding and is widely commented upon by visitors to the school. Pupils also make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and there are pockets of good teaching. Teachers sometimes do not make clear what pupils are going to learn in lessons and their individual targets are not always precise enough. There is good practice of using targets to improve post-16 students' progress, but this has not yet been extended to all pupils. However, staff have strong and supportive relationships with pupils and provide a positive learning ethos in classes, to which pupils respond very well.

The curriculum is satisfactory, but is undergoing radical changes to better suit the needs of pupils. Pupils gain a good understanding of how to adopt a safe and healthy lifestyle, through good participation in a wide range of physical and leisure activities. Students in the post-16 department are well prepared for their next stage of life, through work

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experience, enterprise projects and college placements.

The headteacher and governing body have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development, because they have started to monitor provision carefully and have begun to use assessment data to highlight what works well and what needs improvement. The governing body has challenged the school to improve so that it is judged to be good within a period of 18 months. Although the senior leadership team is enthusiastic and committed, and the governing body are supportive, the capacity to improve is satisfactory, as many of the initiatives are relatively recent and the impact has not yet had time to be fully embedded.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' progress from satisfactory to good by:
 - ensuring pupils are clear what they are going to learn in each lesson and that individual targets are precise and challenging
 - using assessment more precisely to measure the small steps of progress made by pupils and adapt the planning for the next stage
 - using different methods of communication more consistently across the school to aid pupils' understanding and communication skills.
- Improve pupils' progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - developing the role of the key worker
 - improving leaders' and managers' understanding of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage
 - assessing more accurately the progress for pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

In lessons, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties enjoy sensory experiences such as making sounds on a resonance board or reaching out to feel different types of textures. More able pupils are confident communicators and talk excitedly about their enjoyment of school and their favourite lessons and friends. In physical education, they participate with great energy and show their understanding of timing and teamwork when rehearsing a cheerleading routine. All groups of pupils achieve satisfactorily, but not enough pupils exceed their predicted targets. Careful consideration is given for pupils who have very specific learning needs, such as those with multi-sensory impairments. They are encouraged to learn how to become more independent in feeding and communication. Recently, pupils who have an autistic spectrum disorder have been more widely integrated into classes across the school and this is proving to be beneficial for them in terms of reducing the rigidity of some of their behaviour and improving their social and communication skills.

Pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy coming to school which is

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demonstrated by their good attendance. Their enjoyment is evident in lessons, where they show good attitudes to learning and to each other. The active and vocal school council has made suggestions for improvements to the school uniform and a sensory garden area for less able pupils. Some pupils also participate in the Trowbridge Youth Parliament and a regular café is operated by students for parents and visitors. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their social development is a strength. Many pupils have experienced residential trips to capital cities to develop their knowledge of different cultures. The daily assemblies provide good opportunities for pupils' spiritual reflection and for them to develop their understanding of wider cultural and religious traditions.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The development of pupils' social and emotional aspects has been promoted more

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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strongly recently, for example through the very effective use of puppets to enable children to express their feelings, and pupils respond very well to this method. A strength of teaching is also the skilled use of sensory approaches to stimulate pupils' interests. Relationships between staff and pupils are exceptionally strong and this does much to develop their self-confidence and maturity. Pupils are valued and respected, and this positive and supportive ethos benefits pupils immensely. Teachers' lesson planning is variable and sometimes it describes activity, rather than what they want pupils to learn. Similarly, objectives for pupils contained in their individual learning plan are sometimes too vague and this makes it difficult to measure progress precisely. The school has recently started to use a system for checking the progress of individuals and groups of pupils, and comparing the school's performance with similar schools.

The curriculum is developing to match pupils' needs, interests and capabilities better. For example, the school is planning to implement a more detailed curriculum for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, to strengthen the planning and assessment of work. The curriculum is also being reviewed so that subjects are presented as themes that stimulate learning. Early indications are that this approach is beginning to work well, but there is much work to be done before this is in place to cover all the key stages. The range of accredited awards available to pupils in Key Stage 4 allows the higher ability pupils to show what they have learned over their time at school, more precisely than is the case for the lower ability pupils. The school has suitable plans to provide a portfolio of accredited awards that matches the learning experiences of all pupils. A good aspect of the curriculum is the strong link with the local college and the developing link with the nearby primary school, which provide pupils with valuable opportunities to extend their learning and to develop their personal and social skills.

The school takes great care of its pupils. Parents are particularly appreciative of the improving support and communication they receive from the school. One parent commented, 'The new head is excellent and is working closely with parents and listens to their suggestions or concerns.' Well-organised arrangements, the strong relationships between staff and pupils, and the good use of relevant services and agencies help to reduce pupils' barriers to learning. The good attitudes of pupils, their outstanding behaviour and good personal development reflect the good quality support and advice they receive.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<p>The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</p>	<p>2</p>

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How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders share a clear commitment and ambition for improvement, and this desire is widely shared by the staff. The school improvement plan provides a sensible blueprint for further improvement. The school is going through a period of rapid change and many initiatives and improvements have been implemented. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of the planned changes. The headteacher has rightly focused on improving teaching and helpful feedback has been given to teachers to help them to improve. The engagement of parents and carers is developing strongly and the school has recently appointed a family link worker to strengthen partnership working. This has already resulted in improved attendance for one pupil.

The headteacher has been keen to check that inequality and discrimination does not exist in school and has been quick to identify when some pupils may be disadvantaged, such as pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties not being able to access trips or visits. The school promotes community cohesion well at a local level and is forging links with global communities, for example America. However, current plans have not yet been formally evaluated to ensure they take full account of different religious, ethnic and socio-economic groups in wider Britain.

The governing body has a satisfactory understanding of the school's work and systems are in place to ensure statutory requirements are met and finances are managed prudently. It is developing its knowledge of how to hold the school to account and to challenge its performance. Safeguarding procedures, including risk assessments of pupils' individual needs, are satisfactory, although there are some policies and procedures which need updating.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make satisfactory progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are happy at school because staff give good priority to ensuring that they are safe and well cared for. Children's personal, social and emotional development is good because staff have warm and effective relationships with them and manage them well. Given their range of needs, children behave well and are developing skills of independence, such as feeding themselves at lunchtime. Staff provide children with a satisfactory range of activities across the different areas of learning. For example, children greatly enjoy discovering how toys move along the table when they press switches, and they run and jump with gusto when taking part in physical education with older children in the hall. The secure outdoor area is used satisfactorily to promote children's learning, although a lack of permanent shelter restricts its use in inclement weather. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school recognises that it needs to develop the skills of leaders and managers in understanding the full requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. For example, developing the role of the key worker, and ensuring that targets, plans and observations of children's learning are linked in a way that maximises children's learning and development.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Sixth form

Students are prepared well for life after school, which for most, means attending a local college or a specialist residential college. They leave the sixth form with a range of accredited awards that fit well with their interests and capabilities, and provide clear guidance to their colleges on what they have achieved during their time in the sixth form. Leadership and management are good and the sixth form is a safe, happy and purposeful place. Students attend well and show by their outstanding behaviour that they have fully accepted the rules and expectations for learning. The supportive environment is based on high expectations for learning but with the provision for quick and effective help when this is required. The very strong relationships students have with staff help them feel comfortable as learners and as developing young people who are confident enough to try new ways of learning. They gain from the many activities

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they have to practise the skills of independent learning by finding out for themselves. Teaching and assessment are used effectively in planning for learning. Aspirational targets work well in guiding individual learning. Each student knows their targets and, routinely, lesson tasks match well with their needs. As a consequence, all students, irrespective of their needs and capabilities, make equally good progress. Communication, social and personal skills develop well because of the regular opportunities students have to practise these in and out of school when they visit local facilities and the local college.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents hold extremely positive views of the school's work. The school is building closer links with parents and includes their views when considering improvements to the school. Many questionnaires received during the inspection contained appreciative comments which recognise the recent improvements. Parents appreciate how much their children achieve and enjoy school, the high standard of care, and increasing support provided for families. One parent noted, 'Since Mr Cook has been head, mine and my child's impression and experience of school have significantly improved.' A very small number of parents would like more information about how their child is doing and on day-to-day issues. Inspectors judge that the school is beginning to work more closely with parents and that the school is looking at ways of improving communication with parents at all levels.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Larkrise School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 38 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 83 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	66	12	32	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	27	72	10	26	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	18	47	14	37	3	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	50	16	42	1	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	22	58	14	37	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	18	47	13	34	2	5	1	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	53	15	40	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	18	47	14	37	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	60	14	40	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	55	13	34	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	45	18	47	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	24	63	13	34	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	27	71	10	26	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



22 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Larkrise School, Trowbridge. BA14 7EB

We enjoyed our recent visit to your school. We think your school is a very happy place to be. Thank you to those of you who took the time to talk about your work and life at school.

Here are the main points we found.

- Your school is satisfactory but is rapidly getting better.
- Your contribution to helping out in school and to the community is outstanding, such as the school council and running the café.
- The school helps you to make sound progress with your learning, and you really enjoy coming to school, and your behaviour is outstanding.
- Your staff make sure you receive the right level of care and support.
- Your new headteacher, staff and governors are working hard to make your school as good as it can be.
- Teachers and support staff are good at knowing how to get the best out of you in lessons.
- Parents and staff like the improvements being made to your school.

To help the school make further improvements, we have asked the headteacher and staff to:

- measure your progress more carefully
- ensure teachers are clearer in their lessons about what they want you to learn and that you have clearer objectives in your planning documents
- use different ways of communication more often to help you
- provide targets which will challenge you and help you to work hard
- help the youngest children in the school, by using adults to know how well you are doing and making sure you make the best possible progress.

You can help by continuing to work hard.

Yours faithfully

Frank Price

Lead Inspector

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