

Larwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131503
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	315815
Inspection dates	24–25 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	63
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sandra Barr
Headteacher	Mr Alan Whitaker
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2004
School address	Webb Rise Stevenage SG1 5QU
Telephone number	01438236333
Fax number	01438236363

Age group	5–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The 63 pupils on roll are nearly all boys. There are only four pupils in Year 2 and the remainder are evenly spread between Years 3 to 6. All pupils have a statement of special educational need relating to behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. Thirteen pupils also have moderate autism spectrum disorders. As a result of their learning difficulties, pupils' attainment on entry is well below the level expected for their ages.

The school makes residential provision for up to 25 pupils. Residential provision was inspected in November 2007 by Ofsted.

The school has achieved many awards; among them are Investors in People, Eco School Green Flag Award, Sports Mark and National Healthy Schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Larwood School is outstanding. It makes extremely effective provision to meet the needs of boys and girls with behaviour, emotional and social difficulties as well as pupils with autism spectrum disorders. As a result, it is a valuable asset to the local authority and is warmly praised by parents because of the all round improvement in their children. Many have written about the transformations in their children's happiness and progress. One of the parents who wrote said, 'My son only recently joined the school and we have noticed a considerable improvement in his enthusiasm and his behaviour.'

The leadership and management of the school is excellent. The headteacher has used his experience and expertise very effectively to give the school a clear direction and set high expectations. The staff, including those managing boarding provision, are well established, confident and skilled in dealing with the demands of meeting pupils' needs. The school has a high level of stability, which is of enormous benefit to the pupils. Pupils achieve well academically.

These benefits are felt particularly, and most importantly, in pupils' personal development, which is outstanding. Staff across the school manage pupils' behaviour with consummate skill and pupils conduct themselves exceedingly well. With the exceptional care and support of staff, pupils gain in confidence, develop a real interest in school and a desire to achieve. As a result of excellent boarding provision, this is particularly prominent in relation to pupils in residence. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and, because they have such good regard for staff and each other, they act safely and make an exceptional contribution to the success of the school. Rapid progress in personal development is linked to pupils' good progress in lessons. They settle to work willingly and tackle tasks with a good degree of seriousness. Good teaching ensures pupils have challenging work and are well supported during lessons. The needs of pupils with behaviour, emotional and social difficulties and autism spectrum disorders are expertly met and both groups achieve well. Although pupils' progress is measured and analysed in some effective ways, this has not reached the point of precise tracking and planning to ensure all pupils sustain a good rate of progress. The development of a computer based tracking system is geared to helping teachers achieve this, although it is in the early stage of implementation.

The curriculum is good in that it is planned well, is relevant to pupils' needs and captures their interest. Subjects benefit from good leadership and this has given a close focus to literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Together with outstanding personal development, this ensures pupils are all exceptionally well prepared for the future. Provision for physical education is outstanding, the opportunities to play games and improve team skills in particular. Sports and the school's strong promotion of healthy lifestyles mean pupils take their well-being extremely seriously and are cautious about actions or decisions that might cause them harm.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 1

Boarding provision is outstanding because it is integrated with the school very effectively and it makes a significant contribution to boarders' well-being and success. The head of care is a member of the senior management team and his very effective leadership ensures the aims of boarding provision complement those of the school. As a result, great consistency is achieved

in the care and support of boarders across the whole day. The school's analysis of boarders' progress shows they benefit particularly by being in residence. Their behaviour is managed seamlessly and care staff build very well on the work done in school to promote pupils' personal development and progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement fully the means for staff to check closely on pupils' progress and to plan precise steps to enable pupils to sustain a good rate of progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good because the school is so effective in helping pupils quickly overcome barriers they have to learning. In particular, their behaviour ceases to be a serious impediment. In lessons, pupils make good efforts and strive hard for success.

Pupils benefit in terms of their progress from high expectations. Overall, they achieve challenging targets in English and mathematics and make good progress. Standards, which are often below average at the end of Key Stage 2, reflect for many pupils their unsuccessful educational experiences in the past. Standards in aspects of writing and mathematics are lower for some pupils because teachers do not have a precise fix on what the next steps should be in pupils' work to sustain or increase the rate of progress. There are instances also when the rate of progress matches and sometimes exceeds that expected of pupils in a mainstream school. Each year a good number of pupils reach the expected level for their age. A few exceed this, pupils with autism spectrum disorders in particular.

There is no difference in the progress made by different groups of pupils. The few girls do as well as boys. Pupils who arrive in Years 5 or 6, while they spend a short time in this school, often make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding, as a result of the hugely positive impact the school has on pupils' behaviour. Behaviour is exceptionally good and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils' response to the school's high expectation is very positive. They fully understand the need for rules and sanctions. As a result they take a great deal of benefit from the school's reward system. Pupils are self-assured and confident and the huge progress made in personal development makes a substantial contribution to their preparation for a successful future. The school is calm and this is no clearer than at break times when pupils interact with each other very pleasantly and play together happily and co-operatively. Pupils stay safe because they all contribute by behaving sensibly and being considerate. They enjoy school enormously and attendance is good.

As the school rightly attaches huge importance to promoting healthy lifestyles, which is reflected in several of its awards, pupils understand the importance of staying healthy extremely well. The school's Eco School Green Flag status shows pupils are very aware of the environment and ecology. Several are proud to be 'planeteers', diligently ensuring electric lights and water taps are turned off and that the school's waste materials are re-cycled. Pupils make a very valuable contribution through the work of their school council in particular and in raising money for a school they sponsor in Ghana.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers and their assistants are effective at engaging pupils in purposeful activities and in dealing with any anxieties pupils may have about learning. The pace of work is brisk, as a result. Staff work extremely well as teams to support pupils and are very good at managing their behaviour. Behaviour in classrooms is excellent; pupils are quick to settle to work and they enjoy the challenges. Lessons contain a clear objective of what pupils are expected to learn. Objectives are always shared with pupils and this helps them understand the purpose of their work and to know what is expected. Assessment ensures that the work pupils are given is matched to their different capabilities, but teachers are not always sure what the next steps are in pupils' learning to sustain or increase the rate of their progress. Lessons are rounded off effectively with the teacher leading an evaluation of pupils' work. Pupils themselves are beginning to play a constructive part in these evaluations, which is sharpening their focus on learning even more effectively.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. Work and activities are planned well to engage pupils. Their view is that their work is enjoyable and they are clear about its benefits. Pupils value the good amount of time given to English and mathematics every day and they are both keen and assured that they are learning important skills in literacy and numeracy. The provision for physical education and sports is excellent and is a real strength in motivating pupils. The wide range of gymnastics and games are planned in highly expert ways. All other subjects are of good quality and effective use is made of ICT. The development of high quality ICT resources is a good improvement since the last inspection. The curriculum is well enriched with additional activities including drama, gymnastics and dance clubs as well as visits to museums, different places of worship and sports stadiums.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Staff continually encourage pupils to enjoy school, work hard and achieve. Pupils are managed with great consistency and sensitivity. They are aware that if they are troubled by anything, staff will be quick to help them. As one pupil observed, 'Other schools did not give me any help, but this one does'. The close working relationships between residential care staff, teaching staff, therapists and outside agencies result in pupils being extremely well cared for and any additional needs being very well met.

The very robust management of behaviour means pupils improve their attitudes to school significantly. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are very effective; for example, all required checks on staff are carried out rigorously and maintained appropriately. Child protection procedures are thorough and risks are carefully assessed and minimised. The school's reward system is highly popular with pupils and they value it. 'Sometimes I don't get my points', one pupil commented, 'and it's mostly because I didn't deserve them'. In lessons, pupils have excellent support. Teachers and their assistants know pupils very well and co-ordinate their

efforts extremely well to ensure pupils have as much encouragement as possible. Their work is very carefully marked with detailed comments on ways to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher's knowledge and experience gives exceptionally clear direction to the work of the school and sets high expectations. As a result, a substantial amount of expertise in meeting pupils' needs has been built over many years. The great majority of staff are well established and skilled and new recruits are very effectively supported. Staff are very good at encouraging pupils to behave well and be successful, putting this into effect extremely successfully in school and in the residential provision. Governors are very closely involved with the school, taking an active interest in its work through their meetings and visits. They know the school very well and, through their considerable experience and skills, contribute a great deal to its leadership and direction.

Leaders across the school are very clear about their roles, demonstrating considerable determination in continuing the improvement of provision and pupils' standards. The work of the school, particularly its teaching and learning, is monitored on a very regular basis. This gives the school an accurate picture of its strengths and weaknesses on which it plans improvements most effectively. The capacity to improve is excellent.

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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?	1
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 effectiveness of boarding provision	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

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?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

26 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Larwood School, Stevenage, SG1 5QU

Many thanks for the welcome you gave my colleague and I when we visited recently to inspect your school. We would also like to thank the members of the school council who met with us to share their views of your school.

I am writing to tell you what we thought of your school and, in short, we were extremely impressed. Your school is outstanding and you make a considerable contribution to it being an excellent school, not least because you behave so well. We were pleased to see you all making such good progress in lessons. This is because of your willingness to work hard and also because teaching is good. The staff are completely committed to helping you as much as possible. We were not surprised to hear from you how much you enjoy school. What was particularly pleasing was how well you are learning about a healthy life style and staying safe.

We were very impressed with the work your headteacher and staff are doing to make the school so exceptionally good. We thought they had a lot of skills and experience in this respect.

There was not much we could suggest to help your school improve further but we agree with the headteacher that, by looking even more closely at how much progress you are making, teachers will see new ways of helping you make even better progress.

I wish you all every success in the future.

Alan Lemon

Lead inspector