

Inspection of Larwood School

Larwood Drive, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG1 5BZ

Inspection dates: 9 and 10 November 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

The school is a happy and safe place to learn. Larwood pupils settle in quickly, often after extended periods of disruption to their previous education. They trust their teachers and other adults because staff take time to get to know everyone's interests and needs. This happens even before pupils join the school.

Pupils are encouraged to read regularly and supported to catch up. They make huge strides in improving their behaviour and attendance. This is because they know what is expected of them from the outset and rise to the challenge of the high expectations set. They enjoy their learning across a wide range of subjects, including opportunities to gain important life skills such as cooking and swimming.

Physical education and lunchtime games help pupils to keep healthy. Everyone is included. The importance of making good choices and being kind to each other is well promoted. Bullying is rare and sorted out quickly if it happens. Exciting events, for example 'Larwood's Got Talent', the Christmas production and singing out in the community allow pupils to showcase their performance skills. Educational visits, such as trips to the theatre, museums and to different places of worship, bring learning to life.

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

Leaders, including the trust, want the best for Larwood School pupils. The curriculum gets pupils successfully back on track with their learning, including in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans are used effectively and reviewed regularly. High-quality support meets pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs from the outset. This means that pupils settle in quickly and are ready to learn.

Pupils experience a broad and interesting curriculum. Leaders think carefully about what needs to be taught at different stages in each subject. Learning is mostly well planned to build on what pupils already know. Teachers revisit important knowledge to help pupils apply it to new situations. While the quality of education is effective overall, the small steps linked to the important content that pupils need to learn are not always clear enough. Learning targets can sometimes be too broad, rather than pinpointing exactly what pupils need to do to move on quickly.

Many older pupils join the school unable to read. Over time, they gain confidence and improve their reading accuracy and fluency. Phonics are taught daily in every year group. A new reading scheme has been introduced recently. Leaders are checking to make sure that all pupils in the early stages of learning to read get the precise support they need. Leaders ensure that books are consistently matched well to the sounds that they are learning.

Pupils' response to leaders' high expectations of behaviour is impressive. Staff are appropriately trained and so they are skilled in defusing any potentially challenging situations. Pupils learn to regulate their own behaviour exceptionally well. Older pupils explain confidently how their behaviour has improved since they joined the school. Pupils understand the routines and learn quickly to respect the boundaries set. Classrooms are typically purposeful and calm places to learn. Pupils trust the staff who work with them and so they feel safe. Parents are highly positive about the difference the school makes to their child's behaviour and family life.

Pupils are expected to be kind to each other. They learn how to form positive relationships with others. Pupils show tolerance and respect for individual differences through the well-considered personal, social and health education curriculum and themed assemblies.

The middle leadership team is still developing. A few subject leads are new to the role. They are still being trained to evaluate precisely the quality of the provision in their areas of responsibility.

The recently formed trust board reflects a wide range of skills. Trustees act to ensure that they have the expertise they need to challenge and support school leaders effectively.

Staff share leaders' and trustees' ambitious vision for all pupils. They are proud of their school and feel well supported.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a well-established culture of safeguarding across the school. The members of the safeguarding team are skilled and experienced. Staff are well trained and know what to do if they suspect a pupil may be at risk of harm.

Wide-ranging support networks, including through the school's onsite mental health support and therapy teams, ensure that pupils and their families get prompt help when they need it.

All the required checks are completed on new staff before they join the school.

Pupils are taught how to make good decisions about their well-being and safety, including when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders do not always know how effectively pupils are learning because the detail of the curriculum content is not consistently well defined in some subjects.