

Larches House School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119112
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	358494
Inspection dates	15–16 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Sara Morrissey HMI

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 of pupils on the school roll	103
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Bisby
Headteacher	Mrs Julie Bather
Date of previous school inspection	13 May 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. Nine lessons were observed and nine teachers seen. Short visits were also made to the school that hosts the 'Orchard Programme' and to three external providers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, other nominated staff, a group of students, members of the management committee and the senior manager from the local authority. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at assessment information, samples of students' work, records relating to students' attendance and behaviour and documentation relating to the school's safeguarding procedures. Responses to student and staff questionnaires were scrutinised. One parent or carer responded to Ofsted's questionnaire and so inspectors took into consideration the responses of 36 parents and carers to a questionnaire issued by the school in September 2010.

- How effectively assessment information is used to adapt provision in order to accelerate progress and raise achievement.
- The effectiveness of strategies used to improve behaviour and attendance.
- The strengths of partnerships in promoting students' learning and well-being and ensuring that transition arrangements to next steps in education, training and employment are effective.
- How effectively the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination.
- The extent to which leaders and managers at all levels contribute to school self-review and drive improvement.

Information about the school

This short-stay secondary school serves a wide geographical area in the district of Preston. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free schools is high. Most students travel to school by bus in accordance with the school's travel plan. The school is funded for 104 places and accepts students who have been permanently excluded from mainstream school, or who are at serious risk of exclusion. Typically, students have experienced a disrupted educational experience in mainstream schools that often includes long periods of absence. The large majority have behavioural, emotional or social needs and a small number have a statement of special educational needs. Almost all students are of White British heritage and about two-thirds of students are boys. There are no students who speak English as an additional language.

Some students attend the school full time, while others follow personalised programmes that include courses provided by colleges, training and vocational providers, as well as work experience. A number of students remain on the roll of their mainstream school while attending the school on a part-time basis. In partnership with a neighbouring secondary school, the school offers the 'Orchard Programme' for Key Stage 3 students attending mainstream schools in the local area who are at significant risk of exclusion. The school has recently been able to secure the services, on-site, of two social workers and a police officer.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Larches House is a good and improving school. A child-centred approach and strong commitment to overcoming barriers to learning underpin the outstanding care, guidance and support provided by staff teams. This care is matched by the school's outstanding efforts to promote equality of opportunity and ensure that discrimination is tackled vigorously. The comment made by one parent that, 'The staff never give up on any child.' reflects the sharp focus, by leaders at all levels, on improving students' future chances from the moment that they join the school.

A positive learning environment, enhanced by vibrant displays of work and warm relationships between students and adults, provides a climate in which students gain in self-confidence and flourish as learners. Consequently, during the time they are at the school, students' achievement is good. Attainment is rising from the low levels that largely reflect students' past educational histories. Students make good progress in their learning as a result of good teaching that is responsive to students' individual needs. Staff are skilful at adapting activities to provide the right balance of challenge and support. For some students, progress is outstanding because personalised programmes engage them fully in courses that enable them to progress successfully to further education, training or employment when they leave school.

Behaviour improves rapidly because students' needs are understood, and excellent partnerships with a broad range of agencies and external services ensure that support is well tailored. Consequently, behaviour is good overall and supported by high expectations that are communicated consistently. Students feel safe and are confident in the support provided by adults when it is needed. However, despite the school's best efforts, attendance remains low. Although it improves rapidly for most students during their time at the school, staff are keenly aware that for some hard-to-reach students, regular attendance remains a challenge.

The curriculum is adapted well to meet students' needs and offers a broad range of learning experiences that lead to GCSE and vocational qualifications. Students' hopes and aspirations for the future rise because they understand the relevance of their courses to their future lives. However, although the curriculum is enriched by additional activities in school, the school council has identified that students do not all benefit from visits out of school. Consequently, they have worked with school leaders to develop a new scheme that rewards regular attendance and punctuality with visits to places of interest.

The headteacher works collaboratively and very effectively with leaders and managers at all levels. She also works creatively with external providers and partners to secure alternative routes for students whose circumstances make them most vulnerable. Priorities for improvement are tackled systematically through highly-effective team work and a genuine enthusiasm amongst staff to develop new strategies to support students' learning

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and development. Staff know the school's strengths and weaknesses and students' progress is monitored regularly. However, a whole-school approach to analysing students' progress in all subjects is not fully established. Furthermore, the extent to which subject leaders use assessment information to evaluate the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress varies between subjects. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of programmes to reduce permanent exclusion along with the positive impact of strategies to accelerate progress and prepare students for their next steps reflects the school's good capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and achievement further by:
 - developing a whole-school approach to analysing students' progress in all subjects
 - increasing the involvement of subject leaders in using assessment to evaluate the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress.
- Improve attendance to broadly average levels by:
 - sustaining and building on the positive impact of established partnerships
 - embedding the new reward system for regular attendance and punctuality.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The highly personalised support and guidance that students receive enable them to make good and, at times, outstanding progress in their learning. More students leaving school at the end of Year 11 in 2010 gained GCSE passes in English and mathematics than in previous years. In subjects, including art and information and communication technology, small numbers of students attained passes at grade C or above, which reflects the rapid progress made relative to their starting points. However, the poor or erratic attendance of some students limits their achievement and attainment over time. In lessons, students make good progress because teachers are skilful at engaging them actively in their learning. For example, in an English lesson, two, Year 11 students improved their technique in annotating and analysing the text of a poem because the teacher modelled a helpful strategy and then provided good resources to enable them to develop their skills independently. Photographic records of students at work on vocational courses reflect their enjoyment of learning. Time is allocated routinely in lessons to enable students to reflect on their personal learning targets. However, opportunities are sometimes missed for students to reflect on the knowledge and skills they have developed.

Students generally respond well to the sensitive support provided and are confident that any concerns are dealt with effectively. The care they receive supports good social and moral development, although students' spiritual and cultural development is less well developed. Students feel that their behaviour has improved significantly since they joined the school. The restorative justice programme helps students to reflect on their behaviour; they speak openly about the problems that they have experienced in the past and value the guidance they receive from adults. Although attendance remains low overall, students gain in confidence about what they might achieve in the future and develop skills that prepare them well for their next steps in education or training.

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Members of the school council have influenced decisions made about changes to the uniform and the school rewards policy and are very forthcoming in their views about how they can contribute to school improvement. They are confident that their opinions are valued by school leaders. Students also contribute to the wider community, for example, through tree-planting initiatives with the local primary school and recycling initiatives.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

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

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is good because teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan a variety of activities that sustain students' interest and motivate them to learn. A scrutiny of samples of students' work, both at school and off-site, indicates that tasks are tailored well to meet individual needs. In lessons, adults regularly assess students' progress and adapt plans to extend, challenge or provide additional support. Behaviour management strategies are used consistently to ensure that any disruptions to learning are minimised. Resources are generally used well to support learning although opportunities are sometimes missed to take advantage of modern technologies as an aid to teaching.

The curriculum is adapted well to accelerate students' progress and support their personal development. A strong emphasis is placed on developing students' knowledge and skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology. Intervention strategies are effective in improving students' basic skills, for example, in reading. A broad range of additional courses and work-related learning off-site provide alternative routes for

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students with different interests and capabilities. Vocational courses, established since the time of the last inspection, have been effective in re-engaging students' interest in learning. For example, students undertaking qualifications in hair and beauty and construction have progressed successfully onto post-16 courses. Students participating in Prince's Trust and Wider Key Skills courses benefit from visits to London and Anglesey.

Highly-experienced staff teams provide outstanding levels of care and support, working in partnership with parents and carers and external agencies. Regular reviews of students' individual education plans and a well-established and comprehensive network of support strategies ensure that students make swift gains in many aspects of their personal development and well-being. The 'nest' provides a haven for students whose circumstances have made them most vulnerable. Excellent links with other services, including those recently located on the school site are helping to raise students' attendance from low levels.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, supported well by leaders and managers at all levels, has ensured that the highest priority is given to overcoming barriers to learning and raising students' achievement. This reflects the outstanding efforts made by the school to ensure that equality of opportunity is promoted throughout the school. Consequently, students benefit well from positive experiences that promote their learning and personal development. Good leadership of teaching and learning is underpinned by an effective programme of continuing professional development that updates teachers on initiatives in mainstream schools and ensures that assessments are accurate.

Very good communication links with parents and carers and external providers enable staff to respond quickly to concerns relating to individual students and facilitate re-integration to mainstream school or progression onto alternative provision or courses post 16. The impact of outstanding partnerships is reflected in the 'Orchard Programme' which has resulted in a significant reduction in the numbers of Key Stage 3 students referred to the school over the last year. The management committee uses the wide range of expertise available to provide good levels of challenge and support for the school. Good steps are taken to ensure that safeguarding procedures are secure for students working on site and with other providers. Leaders are knowledgeable about the school's strengths and weaknesses. Regular staff meetings enable the school's work to be monitored and evaluated to inform the next steps in improvement planning. Assessment information is used regularly to track students' overall progress. However, a whole-school approach to

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analysing progress has not been fully established. Assessment information is not always used in detail by subject leaders to analyse the impact of teaching on students' learning in different aspects of their subject.

A strong community spirit pervades the school. Leaders have a very good understanding of the context of the community that the school serves but there is less emphasis on the promotion of community cohesion beyond the local area.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Only one parent or carer responded to the Ofsted questionnaire but their response was overwhelmingly positive. Inspectors reviewed the response to 32 questionnaires returned to the school in September 2010. These responses were also positive about the school's work. Strengths identified by parents and carers included: the support and help provided for their child; the friendliness and approachability of staff; the small size of classes; and the better range of activities available for their child. These comments reflect the judgement made by parents that care, guidance and support are outstanding at the school. Parents and carers had few concerns about what the school has to offer.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Larches House 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 0 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 103 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	1	100	0	0	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)	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	1	100	0	0	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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



18 March 2011

Dear Students,

Inspection of Larches House School, Preston, PR2 1QE

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you for your welcome during the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed talking to you to find out about your experiences at school. We found that Larches House is a good school and improving. Some of you told us how much you value the support that teachers provide for you and we agree. We judged that the care, guidance and support that the school offers you are outstanding. This is because the staff know you very well and make every effort to ensure that you have the best opportunities to succeed during your time at the school. This is reflected in the way your behaviour improves during your time at school and we also agree with you that your behaviour is usually good.

Other strengths that we identified during our inspection included.

- Good teaching that helps you to make more rapid progress in your learning.
- A good range of courses for you to choose from to improve your skills in English and mathematics as well as to learn new skills, for example, in hair and beauty, film and media and construction.
- Very good team work amongst staff, led very well by your headteacher, to make sure that the school continues to improve.
- The school looks for ways to involve your parents and carers in supporting your learning.

To help you make even more progress, we have asked the school to:

- find ways to raise your achievement and attainment further by looking more at your assessments in different subjects to see where you need to make faster progress
- improve attendance so that you have more chances to make better progress.

You have an important part to play in this process by attending regularly and staying focused on your learning so that you can achieve your very best.

Yours sincerely

Sara Morrissey

Her Majesty's Inspector

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