

Inspection of a good school: Lonsdale School

Brittain Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 8UT

Inspection dates:

5–6 November 2019

Outcome

Lonsdale School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils tell us they are really proud of their school. They feel safe, happy and accepted for who they are. They feel that they are seen as young people, not just children with sometimes complex physical or neurological disabilities. As one pupil stated: 'It's a good place in general, quite unique, works slightly differently and takes on board learning ability not just physical disability.'

Pupils enjoy the additional opportunities the school offers them. This has included residential visits abroad, working towards schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award up to Gold level and activities such as theatre trips and skiing.

Pupils are secure in feeling safe and how to keep themselves safe. They enjoy the responsibilities of being anti-bullying ambassadors and members of the school well-being group. They want everyone to have a friend or someone to talk to.

The behaviour of pupils is generally very good, and they settle well into the expectations of the school. Pupils of all ages stated that they had no concerns about bullying and knew what to do if they felt worried.

Those with the most complex needs, who need assistive technology to voice their views, feel well supported and able to join in and reach their highest achievements.

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

Leaders and staff have an ambitious vision for what pupils should achieve. The headteacher and leaders at all levels are passionate and driven about ensuring that the best is given to pupils to enable them to succeed. This includes negotiating with exam boards to enable access to external qualifications through the use of technology.

The school want to give pupils every chance to do well and continue their education when they leave the school. They provide a bright, nurturing environment that works in

partnership with other professionals. Health staff, such as physio/occupational/speech and language therapists and nurses, complement the educational team. This helps the pupils to access learning in the classrooms in a positive way.

The small number of pupils in the early years and foundation group are settled into the school well. The improved outdoor learning space allows pupils to develop pre- and early learning skills in a structured environment and allows them to feel a part of the school.

In the primary department, pupils enjoy their topic-based lessons, which allow them to make some connections in their learning. The class teachers have good relationships with the pupils and know them very well. Staff manage pupils' physical care needs well and ensure that they are positioned correctly so that they can access learning activities promptly.

The library area is bright and welcoming, and pupils enjoy sitting in groups and looking at books at lunch and breaktime. Pupils begin to develop a love of reading and gain confidence as they move through the school. The use of visual resources, symbols and technology enhances their access to stories and literature.

Students in the sixth form are well prepared for leaving school. They feel confident and ready for their next steps into further education. Regular visits to other colleges alongside their bespoke transition programme helps them succeed.

Pupils want to learn. Staff regularly check the small steps in pupils' learning in English and communication, mathematics, science and personal development well. Pupils' progress is monitored through their overall learning plans, which tie in and update their education, health and care (EHC) plans. Pupils, parents and school staff all contribute fully so that each pupil's plan reflects their current needs.

Leaders plan sequenced steps of learning in most subjects well. However, in some subjects the concepts are not as connected as well as they could be. This is especially evident with the development of reading and phonics. The teaching and oversight of reading development has not been as securely sequenced and systematically monitored as it needs to be.

The curriculum remains broad with a topic-based approach, through the access to the range of extra-curricular activities during the school day and with the variety of residential activities. The end goal for all pupils is to enable them to move towards independence in the next stage of their education. The use of the on-site residential facility (inspected recently by social care) provides an excellent chance for pupils to develop their independence skills further in a supportive environment. This is accessed by a number of pupils throughout their time in the school.

Governors are very supportive and have been involved in reviewing aspects of the school's provision. There is a good mixture of highly skilled governors who are fully involved in the life of the school. They provide positive role models for the pupils. However, they have yet to consider the effectiveness of all aspects of the curriculum, especially systematic reading development.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe at all levels. Pupils feel safe and recognise how to keep themselves safe. Procedures with transport for those who travel some distance and arrive at different times before and after school are clear and safe. At lunch and breaktimes, pupils are encouraged to be with their friends. They are supervised, but able to make choices for themselves about what activities to take part in.

Clear systems are in place to identify any issues pupils may have. Pupils are supported to manage themselves as well as knowing how others can help them if needed. Staff work with a range of external agencies to get pupils the help and support they need.

Staff are trained appropriately in safeguarding. This is led by a member of the senior leadership team, who coordinates pupil support systems well. All staff are clear on what to do if they were worried about a pupil. Senior staff are always available to deal with any issues regarding child protection.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is not enough consistency in how the teaching of reading is sequenced throughout the school. Leadership of this area needs to develop all teachers' knowledge and understanding of the systematic teaching of reading to ensure that opportunities are made to develop reading in all its aspects.
- Senior leaders have begun a change in the middle leadership structure of the school. This review needs completing to ensure that all major areas of the curriculum have leaders whose roles and responsibilities in the monitoring and improvement of subjects are clear.
- Governors do not yet have a full understanding of the whole school curriculum. They need to understand further the way it is implemented and connected across the school at all ages and stages so that they can challenge the school effectively about the impact on pupils' progress.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This a section 8 inspection after we judged Lonsdale School to be good on 26–27 January 2016 during a section 5 inspection.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	117679
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10088727
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained special school
Age range of pupils	3 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	106
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Joshua Schwartz
Headteacher	Annemari Ottridge
Website	www.lonsdale.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 January 2016

Information about this school

- Governance of the school has been very recently reviewed (June 2019).
- Pupils (aged 3 to 19) have a variety of complex physical and neurological special educational needs which affect their ability to access the curriculum and learning.
- The school does not use alternative providers.
- The number of pupils attending the school has been increasing each year.

Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. Inspectors met with a number of teachers and subject leaders and the safeguarding lead for pupil support.

- The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body and other members of the governing body.
- The lead inspector spoke and met with the local authority improvement partner for the school.
- The lead inspector looked at a range of documents, including: the school's self-evaluation of current performance and plans for improvement; information relating to safeguarding; information about behaviour management; information on the school's website and information on the individual learning plans and links to education, health and care plans.
- The lead inspector scrutinised the school's system for recruiting staff to ensure that the school is compliant and safeguards pupils appropriately. Inspectors also met with teachers and staff to discuss training and arrangements for keeping children safe. Inspectors checked that staff and pupils understand what to do if they have a concern.
- The inspectors considered the teaching and learning in English, specifically reading, mathematics and personal, social and health education. They visited lessons, scrutinised the school's plans and met with subject leaders, teachers and pupils. Inspectors also looked at samples of pupils' workbooks in these subjects and visited other lessons such as science.
- Inspectors looked at the arrangements for entry and exit to the school to see how safe this was. They also observed break and lunchtimes and spoke to pupils at these times.
- Pupils told inspectors about their school and talked about their work and keeping themselves safe.
- The lead inspector considered the eight responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents.
- There were no responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Jackie Mullan, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Helen Bailey

Ofsted Inspector

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