

Inspection of a good school: Larches High School

Moor Park, Blackpool Road, Preston PR1 6AA

Inspection dates:

30 April and 1 May 2024

Outcome

Larches High School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Many pupils arrive at Larches High School having previously struggled to access learning or attend school regularly. They often have gaps in their learning or find it hard to manage their behaviour. In this school, pupils receive the support that they need to help them to re-engage with education and to develop their interests. It is a safe, nurturing place to be. Pupils feel understood and respected. They form positive relationships with staff.

Pupils feel valued at this school. They are taught by specialist staff who genuinely care about them. Pupils behave well and rarely disrupt the learning of others. Those pupils who need extra support to manage their emotional and mental health benefit from carefully designed therapies. This helps to build pupils' resilience and social skills.

The school has ensured that there is a purposeful start to the day with clear routines in place. This helps pupils to settle quickly and to approach their learning positively. Some pupils told inspectors that they enjoy the breakfast provided, which helps them to begin their day well.

Staff have high expectations of what pupils should achieve. Pupils know exactly what staff expect of them. Pupils follow an ambitious curriculum that matches their needs. This includes access to a wide range of vocational courses. Pupils are prepared well for their next steps.

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

Pupils' starting points are carefully identified as soon as they join the school. The school uses this information well to design ambitious and bespoke curriculums to meet the individual needs of each pupil. The school ensures that subject curriculums clearly define the essential knowledge that pupils should learn in well-ordered steps. This helps to build pupils' understanding. In the main, they achieve well.

Staff deliver the curriculum skilfully. They regularly revisit learning to check that pupils understand it well. The school provides staff with the guidance that they need to ensure that pupils learn all that they should. Pupils make a smooth transition into the school and integrate successfully from the outset.

Leaders identify the additional needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) quickly and accurately. Staff are trained well to adapt the delivery of subject curriculums effectively. This is so that pupils with SEND are supported to achieve as well as they should.

Staff check carefully what pupils know and can do in each subject. They identify where there are gaps in pupils' understanding or skills and ensure that these are addressed quickly. Staff regularly provide pupils with encouragement and feedback. This helps pupils to know what they are doing well or what they need to do to improve.

Pupils' reading skills vary widely when they join the school. The school is quick to identify any pupil who needs extra help to be able to read fluently and accurately. Some pupils benefit from more intensive support so that they can access the wider curriculum successfully.

The school has high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Most pupils live up to these expectations. Staff are well trained to understand the barriers that pupils may face. They are skilled at anticipating when pupils might struggle to behave as the school expects. Staff use their expertise to support pupils to make the right choices. Recent improvements to the school's reward systems have motivated pupils to make continued improvements in their behaviour and learning. Pupils know that their efforts will be recognised.

Pupils are prepared well for the next stage of their education or training. They learn about careers and employability in their personal, social and health education lessons. Pupils have meetings with careers advisers and are supported with completing apprenticeships and applications to college. There is a fierce desire to ensure that pupils make aspirational choices for their next steps.

The school has taken some action to address barriers to pupils' regular attendance, for example through increasing capacity in the attendance and family support team. However, despite this, there are many pupils who do not attend school as often as they should. These pupils miss out on important learning and all that the school has to offer.

The school has secured improvements in the curriculum since the last inspection. Staff feel strongly supported by leaders. They appreciate the way that their welfare and well-being are considered when improvements are being made. Staff are overwhelmingly proud to work in the school.

The governing body represents valuable expertise and skills. It holds leaders to account appropriately so that the school continues to improve. Governors share leaders' high ambitions for the school's future.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils do not attend school often enough. These pupils miss out on important learning. This puts them at risk of falling behind in their education and not making positive next steps beyond the Larches school. The school should support these pupils to improve their rates of attendance, so that they have better success in their learning.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour, or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in June 2014.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

Further information

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

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years,

looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	119112
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10321355
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	150
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Damian Callagher
Headteacher	Christine Mitchell
Website	www.larcheshigh.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 February 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Most pupils have been permanently excluded or were at risk of exclusion from their mainstream schools. The school admits pupils throughout the year. Some pupils at this school are dual registered with their mainstream school, while others are on longer single-registration placements.
- An increasing number of pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Leaders make use of two unregistered alternative providers for some pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Year 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English; design technology; and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, visited lessons, talked with pupils and staff, and looked at examples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors scrutinised leaders' curriculum documentation and pupils' work in some other curriculum subjects.
- The lead inspector met with a group of governors, including the chair of governors. She also met with a representative of the local authority.
- The lead inspector met with the leaders responsible for alternative provision and SEND.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record of recruitment checks; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's behaviour, bullying and attendance logs, as well as documents linked to personal development, careers education and extra-curricular activities.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff through Ofsted's online survey.
- The views of pupils were considered through a range of inspection activities. Inspectors also spoke to pupils in single-sex groups. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils for inspectors to consider.

Inspection team

Dawn Platt, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Lindy Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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