

Inspection of an outstanding school: Lakeside School

Lemsford Lane, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire AL8 6YN

Inspection dates: 18 and 19 July 2023

Outcome

Lakeside School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Every day is a special day for pupils who attend Lakeside School. Pupils thrive because of the individual care and attention they receive. Adults have a deep understanding of the needs of each pupil. At the start of each day, pupils are active and busy. Laughter and shrills of excitement are clear signs of pupils enjoying their time at school.

The school's motto, 'Learning for Life', is evident in the high expectations staff have of pupils. Pupils achieve well because of the high-quality guidance and support staff provide. Leaders ensure that there are high aspirations for pupils. They help to promote pupils' independence through learning to interact with those around them.

Pupils enjoy warm and trusting relationships with adults. Staff are quick to spot any signs of pupils becoming anxious. They are highly effective in helping pupils to manage their behaviour. This means that pupils are always focused on their learning. The nurturing environment ensures that pupils are safe.

Pupils make regular use of the community to help them to experience real-life situations. They relish the opportunities to work alongside pupils of local mainstream schools. Their visits to shops and cafes provide opportunities to build life skills. Pupils look forward to the rewards they receive as a result of these activities.

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

Learning to communicate and interact is at the core of leaders' curriculum programmes. It is a key driver in the activities planned for pupils. A very well-thought-out curriculum is closely matched to the needs of each pupil. Leaders have considered what pupils need to know and the order in which staff need to teach the content of the curriculum. Pupils experience a rich curriculum that builds and deepens their understanding over time. Pupils have time to consolidate and repeat learning to help embed important knowledge and skills. This is because pupils' individual targets thread through every learning activity

they carry out. Staff review pupils' progress regularly. This ensures that targets from education, health and care (EHC) plans remain relevant to pupils' development and learning.

Subject leaders are knowledgeable about their areas of responsibility. They share their expertise with staff. They make regular checks of how their plans are working. This support makes a highly effective contribution to teachers' understanding of how they deliver the curriculum.

Teachers know the pupils well. They make skilful changes to their plans when they see pupils make progress, no matter how small the step. Activities focus on motivating pupils to take an active role in their learning. Adults plan activities based on pupils' interests. For example, pupils' enjoyment of sensory play was successfully used to develop their mathematical counting skills. As a result, pupils are highly engaged and achieve exceptionally well.

Leaders' priority is for all pupils to learn how to communicate. They do this very well. From the beginning of their time at Lakeside, pupils learn to use communication techniques such as pictures and symbols. Others make use of eye-gazing strategies. For some, it is the first time that they have found a 'voice'. This allows pupils to interact and respond. Adults make skilled use of signing strategies while engaging with pupils in class. Pupils learn to read once they have built their understanding of phonics. Bespoke sessions build pupils' phonics knowledge step by step. Pupils enjoy using sensory materials to bring stories to life. They particularly enjoy reading books they have made about themselves.

Pupils benefit from a social skills development programme. They learn and use different methods to help manage their own behaviours. This helps them to be calm when feeling dysregulated. Pupils build life skills through activities in the community. They learn how to select, order and shop in cafes and supermarkets. Each stage is carefully considered so that their knowledge and confidence is supported incrementally. They express views through the school council and have recently named the new school dog 'Coco'.

Pupils receive careers education through their experiences of different workplaces. The visits often tie in with their interests, such as to a car manufacturer. Pupils, including sixth-form students, develop their independence and self-awareness. They understand how to follow instructions and learn about keeping themselves safe. They are well prepared for their next steps beyond leaving the school.

Leaders have created a cohesive and supportive staff team. Staff feel valued and welcome how leaders support and manage their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders understand the importance of maintaining a strong culture of safeguarding. It is deeply embedded in all aspects of the school's work. All staff know the pupils and their

families well. They use their training to be alert to any small changes in pupils' behaviour that may be a sign of concern. Leaders are relentless in their advocacy of the needs of families and pupils. They work effectively with a range of external agencies, as well as using their own family support arrangements.

The pre-employment checks carried out on staff are thorough, and records are well maintained.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 outstanding in October 2013.

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](#)' 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	117680
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10268929
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	92
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	10
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Eric Diment
Headteacher	Lynette Johnson
Website	http://www.lakeside.herts.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	20 February 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Each pupil who attends Lakeside School has an EHC plan. Pupils have a range of learning needs, including profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and complex autism spectrum disorder. In addition, some pupils also have visual and hearing impairments.
- The current headteacher and deputy headteacher took up their posts in September 2018.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school manages an after-school care club.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, subject leaders, teachers and teaching assistants.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of governors and held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and interaction, including early reading, mathematical development and creative education (art). For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, spoke to teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead to discuss how leaders act to keep pupils safe. The inspector also scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's single central register of pre-employment checks.
- An inspector met with a small group of non-verbal pupils with a school leader to gather their views of the school.
- The lead inspector reviewed a range of school documentation, including leaders' self-evaluation, the school improvement plan and records of governors' meetings. Inspectors also reviewed documents available on the school's website.
- Inspectors observed pupils at unstructured times, including arrival at school and during playtimes.
- The lead inspector took account of the 22 responses to the online parent survey, Ofsted Parent View, including 18 free-text responses. The inspector also considered 55 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Michael Williams

His Majesty's Inspector

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