

Inspection of a good school: Lancaster School

Prittlewell Chase, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex SS0 0RT

Inspection dates:

9 and 10 March 2022

Outcome

Lancaster School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

The thing that stands out most of all about Lancaster is how much students love their school. Student after student went out of their way to tell inspectors what they thought. Their enthusiasm was compelling. They said that their school is 'amazing' and 'the best school ever'. Students talked about how they wished they could come to school at weekends and how they 'couldn't ask for a better class'.

Staff love the school too. Their interest and enthusiasm makes the school a lively and happy place. Staff genuinely care about the students whom they work with. Students know this and this helps them to feel safe at school. The school has a positive, supportive atmosphere, where everyone is expected to be nice to each other. The 'kindness cup' is awarded weekly and much coveted. Kindness is a virtue that is genuinely valued at Lancaster School.

Leaders have high expectations of students' learning and of their behaviour. They expect them to work hard and do their best. Students respond well to these expectations. This helps them to achieve well, according to their own learning pathway. Students behave very well. They follow the rules and help each other. This makes classrooms productive places where students are able to learn without distractions.

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

Leaders have ensured that a suitable curriculum is in place to meet the needs of all the school's students. The curriculum is divided into 'pathways', which are followed by different groups of students. The pathway a student follows is determined by their learning and other needs. A large part of the school's curriculum is focused on preparing students for adulthood. Students learn how to be more independent as they move through the school. They learn how to express themselves, and have 'a voice', so that they can make their views known clearly.

Leaders ensure that students gain appropriate qualifications during their time at the school. Qualifications are offered at different levels, to ensure that something suitable is available for all students. Leaders are ambitious for students. They make sure that more challenging qualifications are available to students, such as in music, when this is appropriate for them.

Teachers have strong knowledge of the subjects they teach. This helps them to deliver the curriculum effectively. Leaders have thought carefully about what should be taught in each subject area, and in what order. Assessment is used well to check that students remember what they have been taught.

Students are given plentiful opportunities to practise what they learn about. For many students, learning is about making small steps. For students with profound and multiple learning disabilities, progress is about the tiniest changes over long periods of time. Staff are patient and alert to these changes, remaining focused on what they are aiming for.

Some students can read fluently by the time they join the school. Where this is the case, staff focus well on improving students' comprehension of the texts they read. A very small number of students are at an early stage of learning to read. This area of the curriculum is underdeveloped. The school does not have a phonics programme in place and staff have not had phonics training. Leaders identified this as a priority for improvement prior to the inspection.

One of the great strengths of the school is the relationships between staff and students. Students are known very well as individuals, both in terms of their abilities and their likes and dislikes. Staff are skilled at using just the right approach for each student. This helps students to be successful because they are happy, settled and appropriately challenged.

Students behave very well in lessons. Some students have particular behavioural needs in addition to their learning disability. Staff know how best to support students with these needs. This helps students to become calm and settled, so that they can quickly return to their learning.

Students are given a wide range of opportunities during their time at the school. They are given lots of chances to sing and perform before other people. They also learn how to be good members of an audience. Students also enjoy residential trips and visits to other places of interest, such as the local church and theme park.

Governance arrangements are in a period of transition, with various changes of personnel. Governors and trustees are currently overly reliant on leaders to tell them how well the school is doing. Their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum are limited. This limits their ability to challenge and hold leaders to account. Leaders have started to address this. For example, schemes of delegation are being reviewed and new members have very recently been recruited to strengthen the governing body.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Students feel very safe at school. They know that they can speak with any member of staff if they are ever worried about something. Students have great confidence that staff will always help them if something goes wrong. The school's designated safeguarding leads are knowledgeable, experienced and well trained for the role. Leaders have thought carefully about the particular safeguarding risks for the students in this school. They have put strong arrangements in place to mitigate them. Staff are well trained in their safeguarding responsibilities. They report any concerns about students promptly. Leaders take prompt and appropriate action to protect students, where necessary.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The early reading curriculum is underdeveloped. The school has not adopted a systematic, synthetic phonics programme. Staff have not been trained to teach phonics. This means that the reading curriculum does not fully meet the needs of a small proportion of students. Leaders should take action to improve the early reading curriculum, particularly phonics, and to ensure that it is delivered effectively.
- There are weaknesses in governance. Governors and trustees are overly reliant on leaders and do not know enough about the curriculum. This means that they are not able to offer appropriate challenge or to hold leaders fully to account. Trustees should take action to ensure that governance is fully effective.

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 or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, also called Lancaster School, to be good in June 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.

If you are the school and 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	144693
Local authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	10212043
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	14 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	104
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	68
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Barry Levitt
Headteacher	Tom Jackson-Owens
Website	lancaster.southend.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Lancaster School converted to become an academy on 1 September 2017. When its predecessor school, also called Lancaster School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The school joined the SEN Trust Southend on the same day that it converted to become an academy. SEN Trust Southend is a multi-academy trust of four special schools in Southend-on-Sea local authority.
- The headteacher joined the school in September 2018.
- The school caters for students with moderate learning disabilities, severe learning disabilities and profound and multiple learning disabilities. Just under half of students have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Some students have physical disabilities. All students have an education, health and care plan.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

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 met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other leaders, the chief executive officer of SEN Trust Southend, trustees and governors, staff and students.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, music, physical education and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some students about their learning and looked at samples of students' work.
- To check the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors met with the school's designated safeguarding leads, checked the school's single central record of pre-appointment checks, looked at safeguarding records and spoke with students and staff.
- Inspectors spoke with parents as they brought their children to school. They took account of 11 responses to Ofsted Parent View, and 10 free-text responses. Inspectors also took note of 47 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Steve Mellors

Her Majesty's Inspector

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