

St Luke's School

Crouch Hall Lane, Redbourn, St Albans, AL3 7ET

Inspection dates

6–7 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The ambitious leadership of the headteacher, senior leadership team and governing body is shown in the continuous improvements they are securing in teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Pupils achieve well in Key Stages 3 and 4 from low starting points, and there has been an improving trend in the last three years in reading and mathematics.
- Teaching throughout the school is consistently good and as a result pupils' speaking, listening and communication skills are developing exceptionally well.
- The quality of teaching and the management of behaviour and safety in the Forest House Education Centre are good so most pupils achieve good GCSEs in several subjects.
- Pupils' behaviour and safety both inside and outside the classroom are good. They have good attitudes to learning because of the school's emphasis on developing pupils' social skills.
- The school has successfully closed the gaps in achievement between pupils eligible for support through special government funding, called the pupil premium, and other pupils at the school.
- The governing body rigorously holds the school to account for its performance and the management of its finances.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching.
- Teachers' marking of pupils work is not used all the time to help pupils improve their work.
- A few of the more able pupils are not doing as well as they can in writing.
- New subject leaders are not yet effective in their roles, leaving senior leaders to ensure that the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in their subject areas continues to improve.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons, all of which were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team on the school's main site and Forest House Education Centre. In addition, the inspection team made short visits to other lessons, looked at pupils' work, observed 'brunch' and listened to pupils read.
- Meetings were held with staff, pupils, a representative from the local authority and members of the governing body, including the Chair and Vice Chair.
- Inspectors took account of the 22 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), the school's parent and pupil survey records and 22 questionnaires completed by staff.
- The inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including nationally published information on pupils' achievement and the school's own data, the school's self-evaluation document and improvement plans, safeguarding policies and records as well as documents relating to the management of teachers' performance.

Inspection team

Justina Ilochi, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Lynne Thorogood

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St. Luke's School is a 9–19 special school for pupils with learning difficulties which includes complex moderate difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders and speech language and communication needs.
- The school is situated on two sites 12 miles apart. The main site (the Rebourne site) provides for 9–16 year olds while the Forest House Education Centre caters for 11–19 year olds.
- The school is responsible for the educational provision of pupils in the Forest House Education Centre, a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) centre based at a hospital. This is managed on a day-to-day basis by a Director of Education. Pupils attend this centre for variable periods that range from two weeks to a few years so the rate of mobility is very high.
- About a quarter of pupils are girls; the rest are boys.
- Most pupils join the school at times other than the start of Year 5, with the highest proportion joining in Year 6 or Year 7.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced some changes and the leaders of English and mathematics are new.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. Less than a fifth come from minority ethnic backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority) is above the national average. This year the school has also received additional funding for sport but not for Year 7 catch-up.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring that:
 - teachers increase opportunities for pupils, especially the more able, to write more often and on a range of topics
 - teachers' marking of pupils' work helps pupils to improve.
- Ensure that the newly appointed subject leaders are given training to become more effective in their roles so that they make an effective contribution to improvements in teaching and learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Most pupils enter the school with skills and knowledge that are lower than expected for their age especially in reading, writing and mathematics. They learn extremely well as a result of the consistently good teaching they receive and, by the end of Key Stage 4, all obtain work-related qualifications. Almost half of them secure GCSEs which prepare them well for further studies. This is a remarkable achievement, given the very high proportion of pupils that join the school at times other than Year 5.
- Pupils' speaking, listening and communication skills are improving rapidly because of the strong focus of the school on promoting good language and communication skills. Starting in Year 5 and 6, the school works hard to improve interaction by using "signing", and through encouraging periods of calm listening and turn-taking. This has helped pupils, especially those who are on the autistic spectrum, pupils with sensory impairments and those who are learning English as an additional language to become confident learners who respond readily to questions and show positive attitudes to the challenges they are set.
- Pupils build well on earlier learning and progress in Year 5 and 6 because of good teaching. As a result, school data show that, in the last three years, progress at Key Stage 3 has improved rapidly with approximately half of pupils making more than expected rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- School data show that, since the last inspection, reading is improving steadily and most pupils are becoming secure readers before they leave in Year 11. The minority of pupils who still struggle with reading, especially those with complex special educational needs, are making good progress in reading as a result of the good phonics (sounds that letters make) programme in place. This programme combines the teaching of reading, handwriting and spelling skills.
- Pupils progress really well in mathematics throughout the school. Current school data show that in 2013 all pupils met the challenging but realistic expectations of the school, and some exceeded it. This trend is set to continue this year because pupils' attitude to learning is good and they are highly motivated.
- The school actively promotes equal opportunities and tackles discrimination by ensuring pupils who are not making sufficient progress are given extra help to achieve well. Regular checks on pupils' progress mean that anyone who needs extra help is quickly identified and provided with specific one-to-one or small group teaching. Consequently, most pupils who have additional needs such as behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, sensory impairments or those are on the autistic spectrum and those for whom English is an additional language make at least expected progress.
- School records show that there is no gap in the achievement between pupils supported by the pupil premium funding and other pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2012, pupils eligible for free school meals were four months behind those not eligible in reading, writing and mathematics but in 2013 gaps had closed. This is set to continue this year.
- Pupils' writing is improving but not as rapidly as for reading and mathematics. This is because, despite the school's focus on strategies to develop writing skills, pupils are not challenged to write at length and for different purposes often enough. As a result, work is sometimes too easy and a few more able pupils are progressing less well in writing than in reading or mathematics, where progress is rapid.

The quality of teaching is good

- Consistently good teaching has brought about the acceleration of pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics over the past three years, especially at Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Teachers create a positive and welcoming environment which promotes good relationships and high expectations for pupils' behaviour and achievement. Teachers expect high standards of behaviour and are excellent role models. There are effective systems to ensure everyone follows the school rules and, as a result, most pupils are highly engaged in their learning. For example, in a good 'learning for skills' lesson in Years 5 and 6, the teacher used a good video clip to help pupils to understand that people are different. Pupils' cultural awareness developed well as a result.
- Rapid gains in pupils' mathematical knowledge and understanding result from the range of resources used by teachers to make mathematics more exciting and to plug the gaps in pupils' learning. For example, in a highly effective mathematics lesson for more able pupils in Key Stage 4, pupils were challenged to extend their understanding of money and multiplication to create patterns and sequences. They were allowed to use 'fake' money to develop their problem-solving skills so all pupils made good progress.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and they understand individual pupils well. Consequently, the pace of learning is right in each classroom. This is particularly true about lessons in the Forest House Education Centre where teaching is consistently good and well managed so that all pupils make good progress, including those pupils that stay for very short periods of one year or less. Pupils have the right attitude to lessons and settle down to learn quickly. They respond to skilful questions asked by teachers and make good progress. For example, in a mathematics lesson on 'stem and leaf diagrams', pupils used appropriate mathematical language such as 'inter-quartile' to demonstrate their understanding of organised data.
- Teachers mark and assess pupils' work frequently and they provide oral feedback during lessons. In the best pupils' work scrutinised during the inspection, such as Key Stage 4 art and textile books, teachers' focused written comments helped pupils to meet the high expectations of GCSE exam boards so pupils were making outstanding progress towards their goal. This is not so for some of the work seen in pupils' mathematics and writing books. For example, in Year 10 and Year 11 mathematics books, ticks and crosses were used often to mark worksheets with unhelpful comments such as 'well done'. As a result, pupils did not know how well they were doing and were not clear about next steps.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are friendly and welcoming to visitors. Most pupils behave in a respectful way to each other and other adults, both in class and around school. This is because they are taught important social skills in 'skills for learning' lessons for at least 30 minutes every morning. During this inspection, pupils in Key Stage 3 and 4 were working as a team in their classrooms to prepare, share, eat 'brunch' and clear up in time for their first lesson of the day. A focus on 'thought for the day' in these lessons helped pupils behave well throughout the day.
- A unified approach to rewarding good behaviour and attendance and for managing minor misdemeanours is embedded across the school and pupils are able to talk confidently about it. Any off-task behaviour by pupils is managed well. Pupils talked proudly about the behaviour and attendance awards which demonstrated their keenness to work hard in their lessons.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils are fully aware of different forms of bullying and learn about internet safety. They know how to keep themselves safe. School gates are closely monitored during the school day to check that pupils are kept safe.
- Pupils, particularly those who spoke to the inspectors, told us that bullying is rare and dealt with immediately when it happens. The school has developed a child-friendly anti-bullying policy that

it has shared with several schools within its community.

- The school carefully monitors and tracks improvement in attendance. As a result, attendance has improved rapidly in the last three years and is now broadly in line with the national average.
- The behaviour of pupils with complex special educational needs such as autistic spectrum disorders, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties is good. For example, the school has identified the needs of pupils on the autistic spectrum and placed them in special classes led by a trained, specialist teacher. As a result these pupils generally respond quickly to staff instructions and settle down to work in lessons right from the start, demonstrating their good attitudes to learning. Incidents have declined in the last three years and there are no fixed term exclusions.

The leadership and management are good

- Central to its ability to secure improvement is the school's clear view of its own strengths and weaknesses. This is underpinned by high quality systems and processes to check the quality of the school's work and its impact on pupils. Priorities for development and training for staff are geared towards maximising the impact of the school's work on pupils' progress. All pupils are set challenging but realistic individual yearly targets that are in line with national expectations.
- The school's systems for managing staff performance are good. The school has maintained its upward trend in the quality of its teaching by ensuring that inadequate teaching is eliminated, so teaching is consistently good. This has ensured that the rapid improvement in reading and mathematics has continued.
- Middle leaders have provided valuable guidance to teachers about how best to teach different subjects and this has led to positive developments in teachers' skills in planning for a range of abilities. As a result, all pupils at Key Stage 4 obtain a range of work-related qualifications as well as GCSEs. However, the new subject leaders of English and mathematics do not ensure that teachers consistently plan lessons that are sufficiently challenging and demanding in order to continue to increase the proportion of pupils achieving A*–G grades in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The themed topics of work in Key Stage 2 (Year 5 and 6) and Key Stage 3 are well planned and provide positive experiences with rich opportunities for learning for all pupils. Provision is broadened by a variety of enrichment activities, clubs and visits which are focused on sports, information and communication technology, art and music.
- The school plans and reviews its actions to promote pupils' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development exceptionally well. For example, pupils in Key Stage 4 are taught well to research and debate the treatment of animals through practical activities in special lessons on environmental issues. Planned visits to places of worship improve pupils' understanding and respect for a wide range of faiths.
- The school knows that it receives a small additional government funding for sport and has used the small funds wisely to support sport skills lessons and clubs which adds to pupils' enjoyment of school. Most pupils obtain a sports leadership qualification before they leave the school which helps them to develop good attitudes to keeping fit and healthy now and in the future.
- The school continues to encourage parents to take advantage of the literacy and numeracy workshops provided by the school in order to help their children at home and the school's website carries a lot of information about the school's work. However, a small minority of parents who responded to Parent View do not feel that the school informs them often enough about their children's progress. The school's survey of parents does not confirm this view.
- The school has continually worked in a very positive way with the local authority, welcoming the high quality expertise and support it receives. Especially important to the school is the local authority two-yearly review which helps the school to sharpen its focus.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body makes a strong contribution to the quality of education the school provides. The governing body knows how well the school is performing and some governors who are linked to individual subjects observe lessons and contribute to future plans.
- The governing body has undertaken important training and members have used their experience to challenge the school to raise achievement. For example, they have followed closely the increasing proportions of pupils leaving school with work-related qualifications and GCSEs including in English and mathematics.
- The governing body understands the school's finances really well and checks how the school uses any additional funding. Governors know how the pupil premium is spent and the difference it is making to identified pupils. Governors know that they receive a small amount of money to promote sporting activities and are planning, with the school, effective ways to measure its impact.
- Governors make sure that the system for managing the performance of staff is robust and linked closely to pay for teachers and senior leaders. The governing body ensures that safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and seeks out parents' views on important issues.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117671
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	431180
Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	123
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jayne Sheehan
Headteacher	Paul Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	8 June 2011
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