

Longdean School

Rumballs Road, Bennetts End, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP3 8JB

Inspection dates 2–3 December 2015

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good academy

- Pupils make good progress in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Teaching is effective across the academy. Pupils benefit from interesting and engaging lessons.
- Assessments of pupils' achievements are accurate. This helps teachers to plan lessons that match pupils' needs.
- Learners in the sixth form make good and improving progress in both vocational and academic studies.
- Leaders know the academy well. Their self-evaluation is accurate and this supports a very clear direction for future improvement planning.
- The academy's provision for pupils with speech and language or communication difficulties is of an exceptionally high quality.
- Pupils behave well and are proud of their academy. They enjoy coming to school and value their teachers' commitment and enthusiasm.
- The academy's welfare systems are highly developed and ensure that pupils are very well cared for. The most vulnerable pupils are well known to the staff as individuals and are making good progress in their learning.
- Governors hold senior leaders fully to account for the performance of the academy.

It is not yet an outstanding academy because

- There have been significant staffing changes in the science department. This has limited progress in the past and is reflected in recent examination results. The current situation is much more stable and pupils are making strong progress in all science subjects.
- The strategies used to teach literacy skills to pupils in Key Stage 3 have not yet embedded: leaders have tried a range of approaches and are now assessing which is the most effective.
- Some leaders are not using the scrutiny of pupils' work sufficiently to evaluate how well they are learning across a range of subjects.

Full report

What does the academy need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that leaders at all levels make fuller use of the analysis of pupils' work to monitor the quality of learning across the academy.
- Improve the impact of the teaching of reading and writing in Key Stage 3 so that interventions promote more consistently rapid gains in learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher has a very clear understanding of the academy's strengths and where the academy needs to improve. His vision for the academy is communicated very effectively and his determination to create a high quality of education for pupils is a powerful factor in the academy's success.
- Senior leaders support the headteacher well, and translate his ethos into all that they do. Decisions are taken carefully and in a very measured way. When the academy changed its behaviour policy, for example, leaders visited several other schools and considered many options before a decision was made to promote one specific approach. The same consideration applied when decisions around assessment and the curriculum structure were made. This approach enables academy leaders to match policy more precisely with the needs of the pupils.
- The academy promotes the improvement of teaching through a comprehensive range of training and development opportunities that are available to all teachers and are targeted at the level of their practice. An experienced and effective teacher, therefore, focuses on building their skills so that they teach consistently outstanding lessons. A teacher new to the profession develops their classroom skills and learning from colleagues, both in Longdean and in other schools. Teachers value this approach and recognise its potential to improve outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders make good use of a range of sources of evidence to check the quality of teaching. When looking at pupils' work, however, some leaders, including those who lead subjects and senior leaders, focus too much on the quality and frequency of teachers' marking, and do not evaluate the impact of teaching on learning sufficiently. As a result, opportunities to check and compare the progress that individual pupils, as well as those in different sets, are making during lessons and over time are missed.
- The curriculum model that the academy offers is well suited to pupils' needs. Good-quality careers advice, information and guidance is provided for pupils as they make choices during Year 8, when they make choices about their Key Stage 4 courses, and also in Years 10 and 11 when they consider their options for further education, training or apprenticeships. The guidance they receive is impartial and well informed about local opportunities.
- Senior leaders have managed staffing changes very effectively. Several science teachers, including the head of department, left the academy just prior to the last inspection. Senior leaders very carefully selected the replacement head of department and have been careful to appoint well-qualified and effective teachers in order to tackle underachievement in science subjects. This approach has successfully halted the decline in standards. Current pupils in Years 10 and 11 are on track to achieve well in all science subjects.
- The academy provides a range of opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of British values. Well-planned lessons, visits and visiting speakers enhance their awareness of the diversity and culture in modern Britain. These activities gain pupils' interest and help them to develop tolerance. Pupils show a good understanding and respect for the law. This, coupled with a structured approach to widening pupils' personal and emotional development, supports their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- A broad range of extra-curricular activities and clubs are offered to pupils. Many of these are popular and some pupils find choosing which ones to attend quite difficult. There is a good mix of academic, sporting and recreational clubs. The academy promotes healthy lifestyles well and is very inclusive in its approach to sports and games.
- Leaders have undertaken a comprehensive review of the use of the additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils. In the past this has been directed chiefly at Key Stage 4 but is now much more evenly spread across the academy. Its impact is monitored carefully, and interventions are either continued or changed according to their success. Pupils currently in the academy who are eligible for this funding are making good progress.
- Systems to hold teachers to account for their impact on pupils are well organised and clear. Leaders implement performance management strategies which ensure that effective teaching is recognised and, where things need to improve, support is provided quickly.
- Leaders ensure that pupils accessing courses at alternative providers are well catered for in terms of the quality of their learning, which is regularly monitored, and their safeguarding. The courses that are offered are evaluated for their value and impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders communicate well with parents. A very small number of parents responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View, during the inspection. Almost all of the responses were very positive about the

academy. Inspectors also took account of a recent questionnaire organised by the academy where significantly more parents' views were gathered. These too were overwhelmingly positive and supportive of the academy's leadership.

■ **The governance of the academy**

- Governors are well informed about the academy's performance. The minutes of their meetings show how carefully governors consider this information, and how they require explanations from senior leaders. Governors monitor pupils' achievements regularly, and check on the progress of particular groups, including disadvantaged pupils.
 - Governors are appropriately trained. They make use of this training to evaluate how well their duties are carried out and reflect on how effective they are. Governors recognised, for example, the potential for the current building work to become disproportionately important for governors, deflecting them from the central priorities of raising standards. In response to this, groups of governors have been chosen to monitor and support the opening of the new building in 2016.
 - A programme of governor visits is in place, raising governors' awareness of what the academy's improvement strategies look like for teachers and pupils. This has further increased governors' capacities to hold leaders to account.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The academy's systems and procedures meet requirements. Staff are trained and leaders model good practice in this area.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers prepare interesting lessons that pupils often enjoy. 'That was fun,' said one Year 7 pupil at the end of an art lesson. Most pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning.
- Teachers use a range of assessment techniques to strengthen their own understanding of how well pupils are learning, as well as deepening the pupils' self-awareness of their progress. Pupils often provide feedback for other pupils about their work, and take this seriously enough to act upon the comments that they receive. The academy introduced a new feedback and marking scheme last year, and this is providing useful advice for pupils.
- The formal assessments that teachers periodically undertake are increasingly accurate. They are moderated within the academy and across the other East Dacorum Cooperative Learning Trust schools. These assessments help teachers to pitch their work accurately and to ensure that they are aware of any gaps in learning that may either exist or be developing.
- In some subjects, cross-curricular links are very well developed. In geography, for example, pupils are building literacy skills that will support their work in other lessons. This is equally positive in the history department, where the skills of extracting information and building evidence are taught very explicitly.
- Teaching goes on beyond the normal school day. Catch-up clubs, revision classes and general interest clubs based on a subject, such as science, are run by teachers on a weekly basis. Teachers are energetic recruiters for these clubs and encourage pupils to attend, especially those in danger of underachieving.
- Teachers frequently demonstrate strong subject knowledge. Their confidence with the subject matter gives pupils the opportunity to ask, and be asked, good questions. Pupils are expected to think, and often to take on board difficult concepts. In a Year 7 social sciences lesson, pupils thought very deeply about what makes humans unique. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development was of a very high quality as they thought hard about a very challenging concept.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The academy's curriculum provides pupils with a wide range of experiences that prepare them well for their next stage of education, employment or training. A broad range of visits, including several that involve overseas travel, supplement pupils' understanding of their own country and beyond.
- Pupils' cultural development is equally well promoted through trips to musicals, galleries or plays in London. These encourage pupils to perform in their own musical or dramatic performances, which are very popular with both pupils and their families.

- The academy makes good use of visiting speakers and drama groups to tackle issues such as substance abuse, as well as more sensitive areas such as child sexual exploitation.
- Positive attitudes in lessons are actively promoted by teachers who frequently model the skills needed to be a successful learner. This has an impact on the majority of pupils who enjoy their lessons, try hard and demonstrate the important attribute of resilience when things get hard.
- Pupils' understanding of how to stay safe, including in online situations, is good. Pupils reported that the academy had helped them to understand the risks involved in using social media and the ways to minimise them. Bullying is rare in the academy. Some pupils said that they were unaware of any incidents during their time at school. Where bullying does occur, pupils are confident that staff will react quickly and effectively to seek a resolution.
- The academy's commitment to the pupils' welfare is outstanding. A dedicated staff team, very well led by a senior leader, have exceptionally effective systems for pupils' pastoral care. The academy's approach to the welfare of the most vulnerable pupils, including those who are looked after, is equally strong.
- The personal development of pupils who access alternative provision is good. Pupils enjoy the courses they attend, and often return to the academy with increased enthusiasm for their core subjects such as English and mathematics.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils enjoy coming to the academy. Their attendance has steadily improved since the previous inspection and is now in line with national levels for secondary schools. Pupils are punctual and little time is wasted as they move from lesson to lesson around a large school site. Rates of persistent absence are also decreasing and individual pupils whose attendance has been of concern receive considerable support to ensure that they are able to attend regularly.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the academy. They are polite and friendly with one another, and with visitors. Their behaviour in shared areas during lunchtime and breaks is good. These times are calm and social, with some pupils choosing to visit the library or other indoor areas while others opt to play games outside or simply chat to their friends.
- Disruption to lessons is rare. Inspectors witnessed nothing but good behaviour in lessons and pupils told them that this was typical. Behavioural incidents have reduced significantly since the introduction of a revised behaviour code which raised expectations for behaviour in lessons and around the academy. Pupils have welcomed this as it means that 'none of my teachers' time is wasted sorting out behaviour', as one Year 11 pupil stated.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils join the academy in Year 7 with standards in reading and writing that are below the national average, and sometimes well below. In contrast, standards in mathematics are much nearer the national average. All year groups of pupils are making good progress from their starting points.
- The proportion of pupils who made or exceeded expected progress at GCSE mathematics last year was slightly above the national level. This positive trend is set to be sustained; academy assessment information indicates that pupils in the current Years 10 and 11 are progressing well in mathematics. This was confirmed by an evaluation of pupils' work and assessments.
- The proportion of pupils gaining a good grade in English GCSE was above the national level last year. The number of pupils achieving the higher grades of A*, A or B was well below the academy's predictions. The academy has lodged an appeal against all of the GCSE grades in English for 2015. The outcomes of this appeal are not yet known. The academy's own estimations indicate that the proportion of pupils who made or exceeded expected progress at GCSE English last year was in line with the national level but this has yet to be confirmed.
- The scrutiny of pupils' work in English indicates that teachers' assessments are accurate and are consistent. Pupils are making strong progress in Key Stages 3 and 4. In Year 8, for example, pupils' writing skills are developing well. Their writing is becoming increasingly complex and their use of punctuation is expanding. In Year 10, more-able pupils' written work is often very good. These pupils write fluently and in complex sentences. They are positive about the improvements in their work.
- Achievement in many subjects is strong. This resulted in above-average proportions of pupils gaining a

good GCSE in subjects such as computing, geography, English literature, psychology and electronics. The academy's predictions for the current Year 11 pupils indicate that almost all subjects will perform well. This is also the picture for current Year 10.

- Gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others are narrowing. In some year groups they are very small and are almost closed. In others, more support is needed to narrow the gaps further. Last year, disadvantaged pupils made very similar amounts of progress in English, science and the humanities as other pupils, but made less progress in mathematics. The picture was very positive in modern foreign languages where disadvantaged pupils made more progress than others. Attainment gaps, although narrowing, remain. They narrowed in English but widened slightly in mathematics, where disadvantaged pupils attained one grade below other pupils. The academy's English results are not yet confirmed.
- Interventions to support disadvantaged pupils are well organised and this group of pupils are tracked very carefully by senior leaders. Additional support is provided to prepare them for examinations and this is proving successful in narrowing the gaps for pupils currently in Year 10 and Year 11. Attainment gaps in Year 8 and Year 9 are closing quickly. In several subjects across the curriculum, there is little or no difference between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and others.
- The curriculum in Years 9, 10 and 11 is organised so that pupils take a one-year GCSE course in each of these three years. Pupils choose from these courses from a range of subjects that does not include English, mathematics, science or modern foreign languages as these subjects are taught throughout Key Stage 4. This strategy is providing pupils with a good experience of taking examinations through these three years, and means that they take their studies very seriously because they know that an examination is approaching. The outcomes of this approach have been successful: almost 50% of the current Year 11 pupils already have two good GCSEs, and over 80% have one. Pupils are very positive about this aspect of the academy's curriculum.
- Pupils are making good progress in Years 7 and 8. The work in their books shows that there has not been a dip in performance between primary and secondary school. In mathematics, for example, teachers provided challenging work for Year 7 pupils from the first day of the autumn term. When asked, pupils were certain that their work was a step-up from primary school; one girl in Year 7 said, 'it is definitely a challenge – but I like challenges'.
- Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported. Teachers and teaching assistants develop very positive and productive relationships with these pupils and discuss their support with them, finding out what works and how pupils like to learn. The outcomes for these pupils are monitored very well and, as a result of the high-quality support that they receive, their achievement is good.
- The academy's provision for pupils with speech and language or communication difficulties produces equally positive outcomes. Pupils spend some time in the specialist base and the rest of the time in mainstream lessons, where they integrate exceptionally well. The courses that these pupils follow are chosen very carefully. These courses include vocational studies and courses that prepare pupils for work and academic study, where GCSE successes are common.
- In a small number of subjects, progress has been limited by significant changes in staff. In science, for example, most teachers – including the head of department – left either prior to or closely following the previous inspection. Too few pupils were entered for examinations that would have enabled them to gain a higher grade in the past and the legacy of this policy is still seen in the 2015 outcomes. Low aspiration in this subject has been reversed and pupils currently studying sciences are on track to achieve well.
- The academy has used Year 7 catch-up funding effectively to promote better outcomes in writing and mathematics, but progress in reading has been slower. Pupils who are most in need are targeted for support when they first join the academy in Year 7. The large proportions of pupils joining the academy with reading skills that are below age-related expectations are provided with a range of interventions to raise their attainment. The impact on reading skills has been mixed, with some pupils improving quickly and others making slow progress. The range of strategies has not yet been evaluated to identify which interventions are working well and which ones are having less impact.
- Pupils' good and improving outcomes mean that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Learners joining the sixth form have lower levels of qualifications than average. They make good progress and increasing numbers are successful in moving on to university courses.

- In the recent past, outcomes on vocational courses were better than those for the academic courses the academy offers. In 2015, the outcomes for academic courses improved and were on par with national levels. Given learners' lower starting points, this represents good progress.
- The academy's successes in developing learners' English and mathematical skills in the sixth form have steadily improved. Courses are chosen carefully to match learners' needs and their progress is carefully tracked.
- Improvements to the way that learners are matched to appropriate courses, especially in science, have improved the levels of retention from Year 12 to Year 13. Around 12% of the learners in Year 12 last year chose not to complete their A level courses this year. Learners are clear about the quality and clarity of advice that they receive as they make decisions about their next steps. Last year, almost 70% of learners in Year 13 went on to university, with others either continuing to train in further education colleges or through apprenticeships, or gaining employment. Guidance for these decisions starts in Year 9, when pupils have early 'pathways days' so that they can make the right choices for their futures. Leaders track all learners well and, in a small number of cases, continue to provide support for individual learners when they have left the academy.
- The academy provides support for learners' personal development through form tutors and an academic mentor, who is also a trained counsellor. The early signs of underachievement trigger support that tackles such areas as learners' time-management and personal organisation skills.
- The curriculum is broadened through partnership with a consortium of East Dacorum Cooperative Trust schools with sixth forms. These schools work together to quality assure one another's work and support the improvement of teaching.
- The sixth form provides learning to meet a wide range of needs. This is reflected in the range of courses that are offered to learners not wishing to pursue an academic pathway. The academy also has a number of bursaries on offer to learners who may find attending school difficult. Disadvantaged learners are eligible for such support. The academy monitors the progress of this group of learners well and their assessment information shows that they do as well as other learners.
- Learners in the sixth form are provided with opportunities to gain work-based experience within the academy. They work as support assistants in lessons, for example, or supervise younger learners during breaktimes. Learners report that this has been helpful in their growing understanding of employment.
- Leadership in the sixth form is good. Leaders are aware of the quality of teaching and know learners and their circumstances well. Equally, leaders know where improvement is needed and plans are in place to bring this about.

Academy details

Unique reference number	137110
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10005611

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the academy roll	1,158
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Evans
Headteacher	Graham Cunningham
Telephone number	01442 217277
Website	www.longdean.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@longdean.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24–25 April 2013

Information about this academy

- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is in line with the national average. Pupil premium is additional funding given to schools for looked after children and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Around 30% of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. This is slightly above the national average.
- Just over one third of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils with a statement of educational needs or an education and health plan is above average.
- The academy has resource provision for pupils with speech and language or communication difficulties.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- Longdean School is a part of the East Dacorum Co-operative Learning Trust.
- The academy works in partnership with West Herts College and Dacorum Education Support Centre to offer alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection began as a short inspection for schools judged as good at their previous inspection. After the first day, Her Majesty's Inspector decided to convert the inspection into a full inspection as there were aspects of the academy's work that needed further scrutiny. On the second day of the inspection, five Ofsted Inspectors joined the existing two inspectors to complete the inspection.
- Inspectors observed learning in 38 lessons or parts of lessons. They evaluated pupils' work in lessons and outside them.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, two members of the governing body, departmental leaders and other teachers to discuss their work. They also met with pupils from Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 formally and informally to discuss their experiences in the academy.
- Inspectors took account of 11 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) in addition to 86 responses to the same questionnaire issued by the academy in the weeks preceding the inspection.
- Inspectors also took account of 60 responses to a staff questionnaire issued during the inspection.
- Inspectors spent time observing pupils' behaviour in and around the academy, at lunchtimes, tutor times, at the start of the day and during transition between lessons.
- Inspectors evaluated the academy's documentation, including self-evaluation records, improvement planning, assessment information, governors' minutes, and safeguarding systems and records.

Inspection team

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Brenda Watson	Ofsted Inspector
Jennifer Carpenter	Ofsted Inspector
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