

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Martin Paine
Headteacher
Longsands Academy
Longsands Road
St Neots
Cambridgeshire
PE19 1LQ

Dear Mr Paine

Short inspection of Longsands Academy

Following my visit to the school on 15 May 2018 with Nick Asker and Kathryn Herlock, Ofsted Inspectors, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in November 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

There have been a number of changes in staffing, including in leadership, since you started as headteacher in September 2015. In addition, a number of leaders and teachers have provided support to another local school over a prolonged period of time. You acknowledge that these factors have slowed the pace of improvement in some aspects of the school's work. Since the start of the current academic year, staffing has been more stable. You are working determinedly with other leaders to address the school's weaknesses. For example, you recognise that further swift improvements are required to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make stronger progress, particularly across key stage 3. You are making this a central focus of your work.

Governors share your determination to improve the school but acknowledge that disadvantaged pupils made insufficient progress by the end of key stage 4 in 2017. Governors know that they did not focus closely enough on the effectiveness of teaching and its impact on the progress that these pupils were making in the previous academic year. Governors support the changes you are making and are improving the level of challenge they pose to school leaders about the progress pupils make. It is too soon to determine the full impact of these changes.

During this inspection, most parents and carers commented positively about how well staff support their children. Appreciative comments about the particularly wide range of trips, and sporting and cultural opportunities available to pupils were typical. Many parents noted the effectiveness of the school's work to support pupils in their transition from primary to secondary school. They felt that this work helped their children settle into the Longsands community quickly. The majority of pupils were similarly positive about the help that staff give them. Sixth-form students were particularly keen to emphasise their positive working relationships with their teachers.

Staff and pupils typically agree that most pupils behave well. Some parents raised concerns about pupils' behaviour. Very little misconduct was apparent during the inspection; almost all pupils worked well and interacted positively with their teachers and with each other. However, the school's records indicate that a small number of pupils too often disrupt the learning of others. You are working well to help ensure that these pupils behave more appropriately by providing them with additional support, but you accept that a few pupils' conduct is still not good enough. Although some parents praised the way in which staff deal with bullying in their responses to Ofsted's online survey, a small number of parents do not think that it is always dealt with effectively. During the inspection, most pupils told us that bullying is not frequent and that teachers generally respond to it swiftly and effectively. This was consistent with their responses to Ofsted's online survey and with the school's records.

Staff welcome the recent changes that you and other leaders have made. You are ensuring that teachers prioritise disadvantaged pupils within lessons, when asking questions or providing feedback. Teachers are tracking these pupils' progress very carefully; subject and senior leaders are working together to review it and plan appropriate support for pupils who need it. This approach is starting to remove the barriers to pupils' learning, particularly at key stage 4. You are working effectively with groups of disadvantaged pupils who need to improve their attendance, their behaviour or both, and you are shortly to appoint additional leaders so that you can extend this work further.

Middle leaders are working well to improve teaching, learning and assessment in a number of subjects, including in the sixth form, following thorough subject reviews. Some of this work is recent and you acknowledge there is more to do. All teachers are following your updated feedback policy, so that pupils know what to do to improve and are able to make the necessary changes. Leaders are regularly checking how far the work that pupils complete helps them to build on what they already know and can do. Teachers are sharing techniques that help challenge pupils to think more deeply and work at a higher level. You acknowledge that pupils' experience of these techniques is uneven across subjects and that, sometimes, the most able complete work that is too easy for them. This continues to be a key area of leaders' focus.

In 2016, pupils' progress by the end of key stage 4 was strong, particularly in English and mathematics. In 2017, pupils' progress overall was less strong and

uneven across different subjects. Disadvantaged pupils made too little progress overall in both 2016 and 2017. Your records indicate that current pupils are making better progress, but that it is still uneven across subjects and key stages. In the sixth form, in both 2016 and 2017, too many students did not make enough progress, particularly in their vocational qualifications. You have made a number of changes to the way the sixth form is run. These are helping students to accelerate their progress within some subjects, but it remains too slow in others.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that the school fulfils its statutory duty to keep pupils safe.

Staff understand the responsibilities they have to keep pupils safe because the training they receive is regular and appropriate. Adults know what to do if they have concerns about a pupil's welfare. Staff work well with external agencies to ensure that pupils who need additional help receive it in as timely a manner as possible. Pupils benefit from being able to access the school's counsellor if they need to. The school has appropriate arrangements in place in order to deal with an unexpected event.

Almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that their children are safe and well cared for at Longsands. Pupils who spoke with us and who responded to Ofsted's online survey agreed. Inspection evidence supports their views.

Inspection findings

- In 2016 and 2017, disadvantaged pupils' progress by the end of key stage 4 was too low. This is why we agreed that our first line of enquiry was to establish whether these pupils are making good enough progress.
- You and other leaders have made this aspect of the school's work a priority, particularly since the beginning of the current academic year. Improvement is evident. You have responded to the recommendations made by an independent review quickly and thoughtfully. Leaders have worked well with some of those disadvantaged pupils whose behaviour or attendance has been a particular cause for concern.
- Pastoral and subject leaders make regular checks upon disadvantaged pupils' progress. Those who are working towards their GCSE examinations are being given additional tuition, often in small groups, so that they can revisit work that they have found difficult. Pupils who join the school in Year 7 with low levels of literacy benefit from precisely targeted support that is helping most to catch up quickly. The school's records indicate that the difference between disadvantaged pupils' progress and that of other pupils is diminishing at key stage 4, although it remains too high.
- However, some of these changes have been introduced only recently, and pupils in key stage 3 have benefited from them to a lesser extent than have older

pupils. Some disadvantaged pupils in Years 8 and 9 have low levels of literacy, which limits the progress that they are able to make. Your records indicate that by the end of Year 8, the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others widen in some subjects. These include geography, history, mathematics and science. In some year groups, including Year 9, disadvantaged pupils' attendance is too low. The behaviour of a small number of pupils, primarily disadvantaged pupils, remains a concern.

- Our second line of enquiry was to establish whether pupils, particularly the most able, complete work that is suitably challenging. This was an area for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. Most subject leaders have looked carefully at their key stage 3 learning plans, and are making sure that these build on what pupils know and can do by the time they leave primary school, and prepare them well for GCSEs. Some subject leaders have not yet fully completed these changes.
- Pupils are often set tasks that make them think deeply. They use their knowledge to find solutions to problems, and construct well-evidenced responses to questions they are set. In many subjects, and particularly within English and history, teachers ask pupils questions and use other techniques that help them to develop their thinking and consider alternative perspectives. In the sixth form, students often engage in high-level discussion and debate. During the inspection, students used their knowledge to debate the significance of different 'turning points' in the history of Tsarist Russia, for example.
- However, sometimes teachers do not give pupils enough time to think, or direct questions only at a small number of pupils. This means that some pupils are often left out of discussions and that teachers are not always clear about how far they have understood. In addition, pupils' progress slows when they have to complete straightforward tasks before they move on to more challenging work. The most able pupils told inspectors that this is often the case in mathematics and modern foreign languages. Sometimes, less able pupils demonstrate good knowledge during class discussion, but struggle to convey it in fully completed pieces of written work. This was evident within some pupils' English books. In some subjects, including art, business studies and technology, teaching has not enabled previous pupils to make sufficient progress at GCSE.
- Our final line of enquiry was to establish how far current students in the sixth form are making good progress. This is because in 2016 and 2017, overall, students made too little progress, and therefore achieved less highly than they should have done. This was particularly the case for vocational qualifications.
- In the past, too many students in the sixth form have chosen to study one or more courses that have not been a good match for their abilities and interests. Some have gone on to struggle with their work as a result. You have made changes to improve the guidance that students receive. Changes to the way students use their 'study periods' have considerably increased the amount of work they complete outside the classroom. Your introduction of 'pre-reading' tasks means that students find things out about an aspect of their learning before they attend a lesson. As one student put it, this means that 'teachers

spend less time telling us facts we can find out ourselves and more time discussing things with us and getting us to think.'

- Sixth-form leaders are working to improve the effectiveness of teaching in subjects where too few students have made enough progress in the past, including business studies, economics, English literature, and health and social care. Your reviews of subjects and ongoing checks indicate that further improvement in these subjects is needed. Overall, your monitoring indicates that students' progress remains less secure in vocational subjects than in other subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they accelerate the school's work to remove the barriers that prevent some disadvantaged pupils from making the progress that they should
- they enable pupils of all abilities to complete appropriately challenging work in all subjects, so that their progress accelerates
- they work to improve the behaviour of the small number of pupils who disrupt the learning of others in some classes
- they continue to improve the effectiveness of teaching in the sixth form, particularly within vocational subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Inspectors held discussions with you about the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, leaders' evaluation of the quality of education, plans for future improvement, and information regarding current pupils' and students' learning.
- Inspectors met with other leaders, governors and teachers.
- Documents, such as the school's improvement plan; leaders' monitoring and analysis of the progress pupils and students make; records of their attendance and behaviour; pupil premium reports; and the school's safeguarding arrangements, records and files, were examined.

- Inspectors observed pupils' and sixth-form students' learning, and looked at examples of their work, in a wide variety of subjects.
- Inspectors spoke with two groups of pupils, one group of students and with others informally during lessons regarding their learning.
- The views of 112 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and those of the 108 staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire were also taken into account. The 67 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire were also evaluated.