

Longdean School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117523
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	339023
Inspection dates	26–27 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Roderick Passant

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1270
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Heather Jones
Headteacher	Rhodri Bryant
Date of previous school inspection	13 December 2006
School address	Rumballs Road Bennetts End Hemel Hempstead
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The majority of time was spent looking at and finding out about students' learning; 39 teachers and 37 lessons were observed; meetings were held with students from Years 7, 9, 11, and the sixth form, governors and members of the school leadership team, middle managers and the site manager. The team observed the school's work, and looked at a range of data, school policies and documentation including those relating to child protection and safeguarding. Questionnaires from 182 students, 34 staff and 281 parents and carers were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the impact of the school's specialism on students' attainment, progress and personal development
- the effectiveness of the school's interventions to raise the achievement of specific groups of students
- the specific impact of the recent curricular initiatives, particularly in Year 7
- how robust and effective the school's self-evaluation is.

Information about the school

The school is larger than average. The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds. Other students come from a wide range of ethnic heritages with a small minority of Pakistani students as the largest group. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, as is the proportion who have a statement detailing their specific needs. The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing which commenced in September 2004. It is part of an extended schools consortium and provides family learning programmes and community access, including information and communication technology (ICT) classes and homework clubs. There is a designated provision on site for 27 students with speech and language or communication difficulties. The school makes joint provision for 14-16 students with two local schools and is part of a post-16 consortium that operates across the Hemel Hempstead area.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Longdean has improved significantly in all aspects since it was last inspected and responded to the previous report extremely well. This has been achieved because of the exceptional quality of the school's leadership and management which has raised staff and students' aspirations and expectations extremely successfully. The school is united in its purpose of ensuring improvement is achieved, maintained and built upon. The very high quality systems of self-evaluation provide an extremely accurate reflection of the school and the school's leadership stares hard and uncompromisingly at this picture, facing up to its weaknesses and identifying what it needs to do next. There has been an unremitting focus on improving students' learning, which means that teaching has improved significantly and is now good. Morale is high because the success of the improvements is evident and this sustains the school's trajectory of improvement. Given the leadership's track record and the excellent self-evaluation at all levels, the school's capacity for sustaining improvement is outstanding.

Conditions for good learning have been created successfully. Students feel extremely safe. Behaviour is consistently at least good and is sometimes outstanding in lessons where students show particularly high levels of involvement stemming from their engagement with the subject disciplines. This was seen, for example, in a Year 9 group studying *Romeo and Juliet*. Students are friendly and have confidence in staff because they have good relationships with them. Students are listened to and their views are valued. It is a large site but students move around it purposefully. Older students are very aware of their responsibilities as role models and students make a good contribution to the running of the school. The result is that the school is a cohesive and very inclusive community.

Standards are broadly average and have shown year-on-year improvement. The proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades in 2009 was slightly above the national average. The school sets very challenging targets and monitors the progress towards these extremely carefully so that its forecasts of examination performance have been historically accurate. Current forecasts, supported by results from a number of modules at GCSE, indicate further improvement this year. External data indicate that students make good long-term progress. The progress seen in lessons during the inspection was also good, and more secure because of further improvements in teaching. Students achieve well.

Students are supported well by the school's outstanding care, guidance and support. There are high quality systems to identify potential problems early. This 'net' has a very fine 'mesh' so that students do not slip through, and resultant interventions and subsequent support are highly effective. Strategies such as mentoring and one-to-one

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support provide students with specific help. In addition to these systems, students are supported by the staff's commitment to them. Although the school is large, it sustains a focus on the needs of individual students. Not only do staff know their students well and want them to succeed, but also they almost will them to achieve. A parent stressed that his sons achieved well because of the nurturing encouragement they received within a particular department as much as the direct teaching. Teachers are making a difference to the life chances of students. The climate for learning is strong and students are constantly challenged and supported. Standing with a member of staff on duty at lunchtime is instructive. The wink, the nod of recognition, the snatched conversation, the tie straightened because of the 'look' reinforce students' confidence that they are recognised as individuals. Many students lack academic confidence and the school works hard to challenge this. Indeed, the success of the one-to-one work lies as much in developing this aspect as it does, for example, in refreshing a student's phonic skills and ability to spell.

Staff work hard for their students in this school. Even in some good lessons, however, staff do not ensure that the students work as hard as the teacher, and so they are not always actively engaged and assuming full responsibility for their own learning. The school recognises that further improvement to standards lies in developing students' literacy skills and good work has been started in developing key subject-specific vocabulary across the school. A good example was seen where the teacher challenged a student to use formal language to answer a question. However, this was an exception rather than a consistent feature across the school and staff do not always display sufficiently high expectations for the students' use of formal English in their work and interactions.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment further by:
 - improving students' literacy skills so that they use standard English rather than informal language in their spoken and written work
 - increase the proportion of good or better teaching even more by ensuring that in lessons students are always actively engaged and assume greater responsibility for their learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students make good progress in the large majority of lessons. They concentrate, stay on task and work well together when given the opportunity and listen to each other. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of the high quality of support that they receive. In one lesson with lower attaining students, an enthusiastic approach by the teacher, effective support from learning support assistants, and an interesting task drawing on good resources on the school's virtual learning environment helped these students come to a better understanding of how actors might have different approaches to portraying Lady Macbeth.

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Outstanding support for students attending the speech and language centre has a highly positive impact on their attitudes, confidence and achievement. Data shows that the relatively small number of Year 11 Pakistani students make at least satisfactory progress, and the school has worked steadily and effectively to improve their achievement and the achievement of Black minority ethnic students in recent years. Students in lessons are generally purposeful and keen to learn, regardless of gender or ethnic heritage.

Specialist status has made a significant contribution to school improvement during recent years. The specialist subjects within mathematics and ICT have performed very well at all levels. The specialism has also contributed to the personal development of the students through mathematics and ICT ambassadors who mentor younger students and by supporting adults in adult learning classes. The newly introduced applied diplomas in ICT have further enabled students to gain confidence and contribute to the wider community.

Students' attendance is above average and has improved. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students respect and relate well to others, actively fostered by the all-age tutor groups, and this is reflected in the cohesive nature of the school community. They develop the ability to empathise and see things from another perspective and are able to work well as a member of a group and have a good understanding of cultural diversity. Because they achieve well in key subjects and have positive attitudes to learning, they develop a good level of workplace skills.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Lessons are planned thoughtfully to provide a range of learning activities, which are well matched to the learning needs of each student in the large majority of lessons. As a result, students make good progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge and both teachers and students enjoy working together in the classroom. Students behave well in lessons and are motivated to work hard and give their best. Students are also well supported by learning support assistants and ICT is used well. Occasionally, teachers are too dominant and students too passive.

Students' progress is monitored closely. Any students in danger of missing their challenging targets are identified quickly and action is taken to get them back on track. All students are aware of their targets. It is a sign of their maturity that there is no discernible stigma attached to the fact that they or others may need support, extra help or challenge. Whilst there is some excellent practice in the quality of feedback to students, in a minority of subjects students do not always know how to reach the next grade or level and advice given is not routinely followed up.

There are very real strengths in the curriculum, particularly in the way it is tailored to students' individual needs, drawing on the outstanding links with other providers to extend the range of learning experiences. Clearly, this has had a positive impact on individuals' attitudes to learning, attendance and general demeanour. There are also some innovative features such as the courses in Year 7 aimed at developing students' learning competencies. The use of ICT is a cross-curricular strength but developing students' literacy skills across subjects is weaker. The personal and social, health and citizenship programmes play a significant part in students' good personal development. The revisions to the curriculum have provided an important thrust in the school's raising achievement, but have not yet had time to work through in order to raise attainment and other student outcomes to the next level.

There is a very strong commitment within the school to ensuring that barriers to learning are removed for all students through excellent targeted support using different intervention groups and approaches. Directors of house, form tutors, pastoral managers, attendance officers, parent support workers and the student support centre all work with students and parents to provide highly effective pastoral and academic mentoring and support. Arrangements for advice and guidance are very well planned and enable students to make the best of the opportunities offered by the school and by external providers, and transition arrangements assist students very well in their move from primary to secondary school. Students with particular learning needs are identified early and support is provided quickly in strong partnerships with external agencies and

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specialist services. Sensitive and personalised support is provided for students facing a range of challenging circumstances, such as those with a very limited grasp of English, looked after children, or those with difficulties at home. The school has taken very effective steps to encourage regular attendance for all groups of students.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and is supported very effectively by leadership in depth across the school and by the individual and collective strengths of the senior leadership team. An effective combination of challenge and support, training, coaching and performance management has secured improvements in teaching. Staff accountability for students' progress is very much part of the school's highly professional culture. The school's systems for self-evaluation are extremely robust, and use external and internal management and assessment data extremely well along with departmental and key stage reviews, ongoing lesson observations and other monitoring.

The performance of specific groups of students is monitored carefully and action to raise achievement of any underperforming group is swift, effective and where necessary sustained. This, coupled with its concern and support for individuals, ensures that the school's promotion of equal opportunities is exceptionally strong.

Governance is good; the governors take their responsibilities for safeguarding and health and safety extremely seriously and are providing both support and effective challenge, holding departments to account for their performance. They are actively seeking to broaden staff and students' understanding of their strategic role. The governors' self-evaluation has identified how it wants to develop further.

The school effectively promotes community cohesion. It knows its local community extremely well and has undertaken specific work with a specific group of parents to encourage fuller participation of their children in school life. The school is currently preparing a bid for International School status, building on its global links as well as developing links with a London and independent school to further extend students' experience. The school has recently appointed a coordinator and is currently evaluating the impact of its curriculum and other work to support this aspect.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Sixth formers are confident, articulate students who value their education and the opportunities provided by the school. The high quality of the curriculum and the care, guidance and support they receive result in students' outstanding personal development. Students take on a wide range of responsibilities within the sixth form and whole school, including making responsible and well-informed decisions relating to their learning and well-being. The effective leadership and management focus strongly on improving student outcomes and the quality of teaching has improved over the past three years. Students make good progress in their academic work because of the good teaching they receive. The leadership and management have accurately identified that further improvement lies in developing the role of teacher as facilitator of high quality learning with students taking an even more significant role in lessons. The result of the enhanced provision is that there has been consistent improvement in the sixth form since the last inspection. This is a good sixth form, which enables its students to achieve well in relation to their varied starting points. Retention rates are high and aspirations raised effectively so that many students go on to higher education, including Oxford and Cambridge, with a high proportion getting their first choice of college.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Response to the questionnaires indicate that most parents are very supportive of the school and are happy with their child's experience. Almost all agree with the statements that teaching in the school is good, it keeps them safe and it is led and managed well. A few parents did not feel that the school took enough account of their suggestions or concerns. The school operates parent focus groups when introducing a new initiative and regularly surveys parents' views. The inspection judged the school as having good links with parents and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Longdean School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 281 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1270 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	99	35	162	58	12	4	5	2
The school keeps my child safe	100	36	171	61	6	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	103	37	159	57	15	5	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	100	36	161	57	15	5	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	81	29	187	67	6	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	77	27	180	64	15	5	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	52	19	197	70	21	7	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	86	31	168	60	4	1	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	87	31	178	63	8	3	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	81	29	168	60	16	6	4	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	60	21	179	64	24	9	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	109	39	165	59	6	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	117	41	151	54	8	3	2	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



28 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Longdean School, Hemel Hempstead, HP3 8JB

Thank you for making us so welcome in your school. My team of colleagues very much enjoyed the visit and I would like to particularly thank those students who gave up their time to talk to us.

This is a good school. It has made significant improvements since it was last inspected and has many outstanding features. You achieve well and you make good progress in your lessons. Standards in GCSEs and in the sixth form have improved and are in line with national averages. Behaviour is consistently at least good. Older students take their responsibilities extremely seriously, particularly that of being a role model for younger ones. We were particularly impressed by how confident and articulate the sixth formers are. Teaching across the school is good. Staff are very committed to you and care about you enormously, ensuring that the school supports you extremely well.

I have asked the headteacher to work with staff to work on two aspects in order to raise standards further. Staff work very hard in lessons. Sometimes good lessons would be enhanced further if staff made more demands on you so that you become more actively involved and take greater responsibility for your learning. I also asked that staff consistently encourage and help you use more formal language (the language used in examinations) rather than informal language (such as you might use when talking to friends) when answering questions and writing answers. The more you practise this the easier it gets.

The school has come a long way very quickly and clearly wants to improve even further. A strength of the school is that it values your views. This means that you all have a part to play in this process of improvement.

Yours sincerely

Roderick Passant

Lead inspector

The normal convention in inspection reports is to use 'pupils' to describe 11-16 year olds who attend the school and 'students' to describe the sixth form. The school's preferred term is 'students' to describe all who attend and this has been used throughout the

report, although headings have not been changed.

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