

Longsands Academy

Longsands Road, St Neots, Cambridgeshire PE19 1LQ

Inspection dates 2–3 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good		2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good		2
Quality of teaching	Good		2
Achievement of pupils	Good		2
Sixth form provision	Good		2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students make outstanding progress in English and good progress in mathematics. They perform particularly well in physics, history, economics and graphics.
- The academy is improving because leaders have a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching.
- Attendance is above average and students are punctual.
- Students are well behaved and take a pride in their academy. Their attitudes to learning are positive and they show respect for their teachers.
- The sixth form is good and the wide range of courses ensures that all students go on to further or higher education, employment or training.
- Alternative provision at Prospect House is of high quality.
- The curriculum promotes students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and ensures that they are well-equipped for life in modern Britain.
- Governors are effective and join with senior leaders to drive forward improvement.
- Students' safety is given suitably high regard.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The most-able students in the academy do not consistently gain the highest grades in some subjects because they are not challenged enough with work to make them think hard.
- Sometimes, teachers do not prepare work to the right level of difficulty for students of different abilities and do not adjust their teaching when work is too easy or too hard.
- Standards and rates of progress are not high enough in science, French, German and information and communication technology (ICT).
- Initiatives have yet to have a full impact on improving the literacy skills of some students.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 32 lessons, and made short visits to a number of other lessons. They also visited form periods and an assembly. Five lessons and short visits were jointly observed with senior staff.
- Inspectors looked at a range of evidence, including the academy’s documents on safeguarding students, the academy’s view of its own performance and improvement plans. They also looked at information about attainment and progress, and records of the quality of teaching, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors spoke to students in lessons and looked at their books. In addition, a wide range of students’ books were scrutinised in different subjects and year groups.
- Students were observed at breaks and lunchtimes, inside and outside the academy.
- Discussions were held with governors, senior and subject leaders and groups of students about their views of the academy.
- Inspectors considered the 154 responses to Parent View and their written comments. The 107 questionnaires returned by staff were also considered.

Inspection team

Glynis Bradley-Peat, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
John Greevy	Additional Inspector
Anne Pepper	Additional Inspector
Angela Podmore	Additional Inspector
Paul Watson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Longsands Academy converted to academy status in August 2011. When the predecessor school, Longsands College, was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2009, it was judged to be good.
- In September 2010, the St Neot's Learning Partnership was formed, a hard federation between Longsands Academy and Ernulf Academy.
- The academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school with a sixth form.
- The vast majority of students are White British.
- The proportion of disabled students or those who have special educational needs supported at school action is average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students eligible for the pupil premium is below the national average. This additional funding is given to schools for students who are looked after by the local authority or known to be eligible for free school meals.
- A small number of students attend alternative provision off the main academy site, at Prospect House. This provision is run by the academy. Students from Ernulf Academy also attend, along with a small number of students from other schools. There are 21 places altogether for students at risk of exclusion or for those who require an alternative curriculum from that provided at the academy.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in science, French, German, business studies and ICT, so that standards rise and progress accelerates by ensuring that:
 - the most able are consistently challenged so that they reach the highest grades
 - information about students' attainment and progress is used by teachers to set work at the right level for all learners
 - students' learning is checked regularly in lessons and teaching adjusted to maximise progress.
- Build on work already started to improve the literacy skills of some students so that these do not become a barrier to their learning by ensuring that all staff pick up on errors in spelling, punctuation and the use of grammar when they mark students' work.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- All staff believe in the academy's ability to excel, and share the vision the senior leaders hold. The headteacher and his team provide clear direction for staff who in turn, are proud to be members of the academy.
- The leadership of teaching is good. The academy has a systematic approach to checking the quality of teaching and ensures that leaders at all levels participate in this process. In addition, senior leaders use outside experts to check their judgements and to help to cross-reference the findings. Documentation shows an accurate assessment of the aspects of teaching that require improvement, identifying the same issues that were found by the inspection team. The impact of the academy's work to improve teaching is seen in the accelerating rates of progress across many subject areas in the academy.
- Middle leaders are confident and continue to develop their role in improving teaching. They hold teachers to account for the progress students make in their subject area. They identify any underachievement early and put effective measures in place to boost attainment.
- The academy has clearly linked pay to performance. Some teachers eligible for progression through the pay scale did not receive a pay increase. There is also clear evidence to demonstrate that better teachers move up the pay scale more quickly.
- The curriculum places a strong emphasis on enterprise, work experience and employability skills. All students in Year 10, for example, undertake work experience, and the feedback which students are given from this is sharp and relevant. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also strongly promoted. The religious education ethics programme discusses the issues of Christian marriage, same-sex relationships, and Britain's approach to world current affairs; for example, the military involvement in Iraq. Besides offering a wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities, students have the opportunity to take sports leader and coaching qualifications.
- A working party has been set up to consider new ways to assess how well students are doing. Currently, the academy is continuing to use National Curriculum levels and grades.
- The Prospect House alternative provision run by the academy is of high quality. There are strong processes in place for referral prior to starting in the provision. Progress and attitudes are tracked rigorously, generating reports which are sent regularly to senior leaders, who check students' achievement. Most students reintegrate successfully into the main academy. All of them go on to gain appropriate qualifications by the end of Year 11.
- Parents are very positive about the academy and the large majority would recommend it to others. The academy has worked well with parents to ensure a smooth transition from primary school to Year 7. Good advice and guidance provided for students in Year 11 ensures that all progress to further education, training or employment.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body oversees the work of this academy, and of Ernulf Academy. This ensures that both academies work together to raise standards and improve teaching. Governors have a broad range of skills which they put to good use. They have a clear understanding of the strengths and relative weaknesses through an understanding of the performance information and they quiz leaders accordingly about how they are to address the areas which need improvement.
 - Appointed governors set challenging targets for the headteacher and the academy as a whole. They ensure that pay increases are only awarded where there is clear evidence that students are making good progress.
 - Governors make sure that key values such as tolerance and understanding of the beliefs of others are carefully promoted. Assemblies and the curriculum ensure that teachers encourage tolerance and respect among students to prepare them for life in modern Britain.
 - Governors ensure that students are safe in the academy and that all required safeguarding checks and

statutory requirements are met.

- The governing body knows how extra funding, including pupil premium funding, is spent and have an understanding of the impact this has had on the achievement of disadvantaged students.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students' attitudes to learning in most lessons is good. Students behave well and show respect in assemblies. Breaks and lunchtime are calm and well ordered. Students engage well with the work they are given and show the ability to work collaboratively and on their own. Students state that disruption to lessons is rare and, on most occasions when disruption occurs, it is dealt with effectively by the teacher.
- Students understand the academy's behaviour management systems and say they are usually applied in the same way by most teachers. Behaviour logs indicate a robust and systematic approach to recording behaviour incidents, which have significantly declined between 2013 and 2014. The academy's view is that this is evidence of the success of the academy's restorative justice approach to behaviour management. This gives students the opportunity to speak with their teacher and to reflect and explain why they behaved inappropriately.
- As part of a wider focus on health, healthy eating and well-being, student representatives participate in a number of partnership and town-wide initiatives. This includes; helping to rewrite the St Neots Town Drugs Policy, contributing to the writing and updating of the Academy Transport Plan, introducing a breakfast club, and helping to promote the importance of health and healthy eating as part of the Academy Food Plan.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students themselves stated that they felt safe and that the academy does its best to keep them safe.
- Most parents agree that their child feels safe at the academy and agree that it deals effectively with bullying. The academy's systems for recording incidents of bullying, racism, and homophobia are systematic and viewed by students as effective. They know what constitutes bullying and have a good understanding of cyber-bullying and the dangers of social networking.
- Attendance is above the national average. Punctuality is good and is dealt with robustly by the academy, with detentions for lateness. Students are well aware of actions taken by the academy, both if late or absent. Exclusions are below the national average and declining. There were no permanent exclusions in 2013–14.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good and is characterised by the high expectations of most teachers and the good relationships between staff and students. Teachers care about how well their students achieve. The secure subject knowledge of most teachers promotes students' confidence to ask questions.
- Questioning in most lessons is effective in that it probes students' understanding and challenges them to build further on their answer. This was evident, for example, in a Year 9 history lesson, where the students were able to develop their initial ideas about the moral issues of slavery through the direct questioning of the teacher. This also contributed well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- In mathematics in Year 11, students were encouraged to think for themselves and to persevere with a mathematics problem about patterns made with toothpicks. When students thought they had finished, the teacher stretched them still further by asking more 'what would happen if' questions.

- The teaching in the alternative provision is strong. Records are thorough, and information about students' progress and attainment is detailed. As a result of effective teaching, these students make at least good progress.
- When marking students' books, teachers' encouraging comments, further questions and challenges ensure that students understand what it is they need to do to improve, although students do not always respond to teachers' comments by following the advice they are given. Although presentation and handwriting are good, marking makes less contribution than it should to the development of students' literacy skills. This is because teachers do not consistently pick up spelling, punctuation and grammar errors when they mark students' work.
- There are examples of teachers making good use of the information they have about what students know and can do to match work to their different abilities. For example, in a Year 8 geography lesson on map work, the teacher had prepared well for the full range of ability; the most able were well challenged, but equally, the least able were well supported. Sometimes, however, teachers do not set work which is at the right level of difficulty. Neither do they check students' progress regularly or alter their plans when the most able are not challenged well enough. This means that these students complete work which is too easy and they do not make the progress they could or reach the grades of which they are capable.
- Students who struggle with reading receive effective support both in and out of class from teachers. This ensures that they catch up with their classmates effectively.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students start at the academy with attainment which is usually below average, although this varies from year to year. They leave the academy with results which are broadly average as measured by the proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades including English and mathematics. This represents good progress from their starting points. The dip in achievement evidenced in 2013 has been reversed and the academy's provisional results for 2014 show substantial improvement and a return to previous levels. This is because rates of progress accelerated as a result of firm action taken by leaders.
- Students make outstanding progress in English. They also make at least good progress in mathematics, physics, history, economics and graphics. Across a variety of other subjects, students achieve in line with national standards at grade C. They are prepared well for the next stage of their education or training.
- In a few subjects, including science, business studies, French, German and ICT, the most able students do not achieve the grades of which they are capable. This is because these students are sometimes set work that is too easy for them. Weak teaching in the past has also been a factor which has affected their progress over time.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Their achievement, behaviour and attendance are all closely checked to ensure that their specific needs are catered for. Extra help and support are provided by an effective team of teaching assistants.
- The academy ensures that there are equal opportunities for all and has worked to close gaps in achievement for all groups of learners. Disadvantaged students make good progress overall, although their progress is more rapid in English than in mathematics. Gaps in attainment between disadvantaged students and other students in the school have narrowed in English to half a GCSE grade. Although gaps in mathematics have reduced over time, the gap last year remained the same as the previous year and these students were a grade behind their peers. In relation to students nationally, disadvantaged students are within two thirds of a grade of other students in both English and mathematics.
- The academy entered a small number of students early in English in 2014 following careful consideration and as part of an overall strategy to support these students. This yielded a positive result for the students and ensured that they reached the grades of which they were capable.

- Year 7 'catch up' funding is used well to provide support for the minority of students identified as performing below Level 4 in their primary schools. As a result of effective booster classes in phonics (the sounds that letters make), spelling, handwriting and mathematics, these students make accelerated progress so that they catch up with their classmates.
- The progress of those students attending the alternative provision is good. As a result, they go on to achieve passes in a variety of courses including English, mathematics, science and information and communications technology.

The sixth form provision is good

- Achievement in the sixth form is good. The majority of students previously completed Year 11 at the academy but a significant minority come from Ernulf Academy and start with lower levels of attainment than those from Longsands. Overall, students start their courses with below-average standards and they leave with broadly average levels of attainment. There were significant improvements in examination results in both Years 12 and 13 in 2014. This is because the academy guided students towards the right courses more effectively. There are no gaps between the achievement of different groups of students. Disadvantaged students and those who have special educational needs make equally good progress as their peers.
- The proportion of students staying on into the sixth form has increased as the reputation of the academy continues to grow. It is well respected in the local community and there are strong links with local employers. There is a wide range of academic and work-related courses which help prepare students well for life in further education, employment and training. Personalised support and good teaching ensure that all students continue their studies or enter the world of work. Students are highly positive about the academy.
- Teaching in the sixth form has improved and is good. Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve. They ensure that work is marked thoroughly and that students keep marked pieces of work in the academy. This is so they can refer to comments in previous work and see that these are used to make improvements to future work. In mathematics, this is particularly effective and enables students to make great strides in their understanding.
- Leadership in the sixth form is good. Leaders have driven through improvements in results. They have challenged underperformance in particular subjects and continually adjust the courses they offer to ensure that all students have the best opportunities to succeed after they leave the academy.
- The sixth form is not yet outstanding because, in Year 13, students do not always achieve the higher grades, particularly in biology, chemistry, applied science and computing. There is not a consistent approach to providing students with information about how well they are doing or checking whether the most able students are on track to reach the highest grades.

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	136992
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	448616

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	1780
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	349
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karl Wainwright
Headteacher	Rick Carroll
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
Telephone number	01480 353535
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