

# Larkmead School

Faringdon Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 1RF

**Inspection dates** 20–21 February 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>3</b>
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students are not yet achieving well and standards are not high enough in all subjects. There is too much variation in achievement between subjects, and it is especially weak in core science and English.
- The quality of teaching over time has not yet resulted in consistently good progress for all students.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Students following A- and AS-level courses do not always make fast enough progress.
- Checks on the quality of teaching and the impact of new initiatives have not been rigorous enough over time to lead to consistently good teaching and better achievement.
- The teaching of literacy across the curriculum is not strong enough and the recent accelerated reading schemes and student mentoring programmes have not yet had a noticeable impact.
- Teachers do not always follow the school's marking policy so students are sometimes unsure about how to improve their work and do better.
- Not all teachers have high enough expectations of students, or encourage them to produce good quality work.
- The governing body does not have a full understanding of students' progress and has not ensured that teaching and achievement are as good as they need to be.

### The school has the following strengths

- Some students make good progress in mathematics. Achievement in the three separate sciences are good.
- The progress of the small number of students following applied A- and AS-level courses is good.
- Behaviour is good and improving because of the consistent application of the school's policies. Students feel safe, have positive attitudes to work and enjoy school.
- Attendance is above average and the school acts quickly in cases where students are persistently absent. Exclusions are low and now falling.
- The appointment of good teachers and senior leaders has increased the school's capacity to make further improvements. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving and pupils are making faster progress.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 33 lessons. Of these, 17 were joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors also observed tutor time for different groups of students.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors, and three groups of students.
- Inspectors took account of 112 responses to the online Parent View survey and the comments of one written response from a parent. The lead inspector looked at questionnaires returned by 108 staff.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school improvement plan, scrutinised the school's data about students' achievement, examined records about behaviour and attendance, and looked at the way the governing body and leaders monitor and evaluate the school's work.

## Inspection team

Robert Ridout, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
David Rzeznik	Additional Inspector
Heather Leatt	Additional Inspector
Glen Goddard	Additional Inspector
David King	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Larkmead is an average-sized secondary school. There are more girls than boys.
- The school works with its primary school providers as part of the Abingdon Partnership. It also works within the Abingdon Consortium to support its sixth form students.
- The school has specialist status in Performing Arts and has achieved the Artsmark Gold award.
- Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is average. The proportion learning English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional funding for looked after children, students known to be eligible for free school meals and children of service families, is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of students with special educational needs who are supported through school action is above the national average. This is also the case for the proportion of students supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations of students' attainment and progress.
- The school does not use alternative provision for its students.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better, both in the main school and in the sixth form, to raise students' achievement by :
  - having consistently high expectations of what students can achieve so they make more rapid progress, especially in core science and English, so that so that their attainment at least reaches the national averages in public examinations
  - using information about students' progress more effectively to inform the planning of lessons to meet the needs of all learners
  - sharing best practice to ensure that all students understand what they are expected to learn and are consistently set work that is appropriately demanding
  - using questioning more effectively to check and improve understanding by directly engaging students in conversations about what they are learning and how they can make better progress.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers, including governors, by ensuring that:
  - leaders' checking on the quality of teaching takes into account evidence of its impact on students' progress in lessons and over time
  - the progress of individual students is tracked more closely from their starting points on entry to the school and the impact of actions taken to support learners to make faster progress can be demonstrated
  - all staff are given the opportunity to observe the good practice in teaching that already exists in the school
  - literacy and marking policies and procedures are implemented consistently by all staff
  - the governing body regularly receives detailed information about students' achievement and the quality of teaching and rigorously holds the school to account for its work.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Achievement is not good because students do not make consistently good progress as they move through the school. This also applies to the progress of the sixth form students following AS- and A-level subjects. As a result, standards are not high enough. Nevertheless, progress is improving as a result of better teaching.
- When students join the school in Year 7, their attainment is below that found nationally and they leave in Year 11 in a similar position. Over time, they have not made enough progress to close the gaps with all students nationally.
- The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C including English and mathematics was in line with the national averages in 2010 but has fallen below the national averages since then. However, the proportion of students attaining five or more higher GCSE grades in total, but not necessarily including both English and mathematics, is improving.
- Students do not achieve as well in English as they do in mathematics because of weaknesses in teaching. The proportion of students making the expected progress in English in the last two years was slightly below the national average and is currently below the government's current floor standard. Standards are better in mathematics and many groups in this subject are making good progress.
- Above average numbers take separate GCSE courses in biology, chemistry and physics and students make better than expected progress in these subjects. Almost all other students take the double science option and standards remain well below average. This is because the teaching in science is too variable.
- Students make good progress in modern foreign languages. Standards have improved in design and technology, and music. Although standards are also rising in other subjects, they remain below the national averages because the rate of improvement is too slow and the teaching is not matched well enough to the students' needs.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve better than their peers. This is because the school identifies their needs early and provides good support for each individual student.
- The school promotes equality of opportunity adequately and there are no significant differences in the achievements of different ethnic groups or for those speaking English as an additional language.
- The school uses the pupil premium funding to make sure eligible students are supported through projects to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. The strategy to support them to secure better grades and other outcomes has resulted in these students, including those entitled to free school meals, making good progress and achieving well. Their attainment in English and mathematics, based on their average point scores, is improving and the gap with the performance of all students nationally is closing.
- The school does not make extensive use of early entry for GCSE examinations.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement as it is not consistently good or better. This means that students' progress varies and not enough make rapid progress in English and science.
- The quality of teaching is improving but it remains too variable as it is not matched to the specific learning needs of students and often fails to take into account their starting points in terms of what they already know and understand.
- Typically, lessons are led confidently by teachers with good subject knowledge, but too often students spend long periods of time copying or, as a class group, listening to the teacher without the chance to ask questions or engage in activity or dialogue with each other. Teachers do not

always use questions effectively to deepen students' understanding.

- In too many instances, marking is too brief and does not explain to students what they need to do to improve. Poor presentation is not always challenged and although some teachers point out spelling and grammatical errors, they do not then check that students have taken account of, and learned from, their comments.
- Students describe their best lessons as those where teachers plan well and describe clearly what the class is to learn. They value teachers who plan work for the different groups in their class and give them the opportunity to work together in pairs or groups and check their understanding when they need to. Students like the fact that they can work at their own pace and not wait for others in their class, so their learning is not held back.
- In the more effective teaching, lessons are well organised and offer a variety of relevant learning activities that engage and motivate students. For example, in a drama lesson, the teacher planned for students to work in different ability groups. Students were encouraged to think about their learning and to challenge and test their understanding with the support of the teacher. The lesson progressed at a pace that engaged learners throughout. This good teaching was underpinned by good marking that set high expectations for both the quality of work and for the standard of presentation.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** is good

- Students are well behaved and polite around the school. They are keen to engage in class activities and show positive attitudes to learning. Students respect each other and cooperate with all staff.
- The school manages behaviour well and staff are generally consistent in their use of the school behaviour policy. Where teaching is less engaging, students occasionally lose their focus and become restless but generally respond well to teachers' reminders about their conduct.
- Parents and carers who responded to Parent View, and staff who completed the staff questionnaire, agree that behaviour in and around the school is good.
- Students are proud of their school community and speak positively about each other. Staff at the school promote and model good behaviour. Students talk openly about how teachers respect them and how they respect their peers and the adults within the school community.
- Bullying is extremely rare. Students are confident that staff will deal with the rare incidents of bullying quickly and effectively. They feel safe and know about different forms of bullying and how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. There are no racist incidents or any forms of discrimination.
- Attendance is above the national average. Incidents of exclusions are falling as a result of the school's interventions.
- Students take on many responsibilities, including those of the student council. They would like more opportunities to shape and influence activities within their school.

### **The leadership and management** requires improvement

- Leadership overall is not yet good because students' achievement and teaching require further improvement. The pace of change has not been fast enough to tackle the weaknesses and subsequent decline in standards over the past two years. The school's GCSE results in 2012 were lower than expected.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body know the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They understand their roles and responsibilities and share the vision for making the school more successful. They have a clear agenda for raising achievement for all students.
- The school's improvement plan sets out clear priorities and helps to drive through improvements in a systematic way. Recent appointments to the senior team have strengthened

leadership at all levels. The impact of their work is evident in much improved behaviour, improving teaching and a quickening of progress for students. This demonstrates that the school has the capacity to continue to improve.

- Training for staff is appropriately focused on the school's priorities and linked to the needs of individual teachers and is resulting in better teaching. However, actions to improve teaching and share 'best practice' are not always implemented consistently or targeted systematically enough to turn around less effective teaching quickly.
  - Historically, the school has not tracked the progress of individual pupils closely enough. A better tracking system has now been introduced which has begun to hold teachers to account for the progress of their pupils more rigorously but has not yet resulted in the consistently good practice required to secure good achievement for all students.
  - Checks on the quality of teaching are more frequent but the evaluation of its quality does not fully take into account the impact teaching has on students' progress. Not enough emphasis has been placed on the impact of marking and feedback, and the checks to ensure that school policies, such as the literacy and marking policies, are put into practice consistently are not rigorous enough.
  - Performance management is more robust and is undertaken regularly. Support is provided where teaching is weak or a team is identified as underperforming. The school has not yet linked performance targets to students' progress and with pay progression.
  - The local authority has provided effective support to the school through its school improvement partner and now is appropriately stepping back as the school builds its own capacity.
  - The curriculum does not enable all students to achieve as well as they should, especially in core science and in physical education. The lack of vocational courses limits some students' achievements. Daily tutorial time helps to broaden students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development appropriately. Opportunities for adults to listen to students read aloud are missed. Activities at the end of each day encourage students to join in sports and the arts, to catch up on their learning and to prepare for examinations.
  - Parents and carers are happy with and supportive of the school. One parent wrote in, praising the school for much of its work.
  - All statutory safeguarding requirements are met. The school carries out the necessary checks on staff to ensure their suitability to work with children. All staff have undergone training to the required levels.
  - **The governance of the school:**
    - Governance requires improvement. The governing body has worked hard with the headteacher to eradicate the deficit budget and put the school on a stable financial footing. They have given insufficient attention to the way that the pupil premium is spent and its impact, although the outcomes for these students have improved. The Chair of the Governing Body has a realistic view of the school's effectiveness, based on his understanding of its current performance. There is clear determination across the governing body to improve standards and secure a more rapid pace of change. Governors have benefitted from training, monitor many areas of the school's work closely and ask challenging questions of school leaders. They have supported the headteacher in taking action to tackle inadequate teaching and raising achievement. However, they are not fully informed of students' achievement relative to their starting points as they do not receive reports from the headteacher and school leaders about students' progress and how this relates to the quality of teaching. Governors do not know enough about performance management and the link between the quality of teaching, pupils' progress and movement through the salary scales.
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## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	123255
<b>Local authority</b>	Oxfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	406152

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	917
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	130
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Dr David Lever
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Chris Harris
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 June 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01235 520141
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