

Longfield Academy of Sport

Longfield Road, Darlington, County Durham, DL3 0HT

Inspection dates 17–18 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher's high ambition and resolute drive has led to a rapid improvement since the last inspection. Senior leaders have worked tirelessly to eradicate underperformance. Consequently, the quality of teaching has improved strongly and achievement is now good.
- The proportion of students attaining a good GCSE in English and mathematics, plus at least three other subjects in 2014 was above the national average when best entry results are taken into account.
- The number of most able students achieving higher grades is rising. In English and mathematics, higher than average proportions are on track to attain the highest grades.
- Teaching is led and managed very well. As a result, teachers are working successfully to raise the aspirations of all students and eradicate past underachievement and low attainment.
- Learning is most effective when students are inspired, their interest 'hooked' and full account is taken of their different abilities and interests.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted effectively through a varied range of curriculum activities.
- Those disabled students, those with special educational needs or who speak English as an additional language are well supported to achieve as well as their peers.
- Attainment gaps between the disadvantaged students and their peers nationally are almost eliminated in English and are rapidly narrowing in mathematics.
- Behaviour in lessons and social times is good. Students feel safe and secure. The improving attendance and low exclusion rates reflect the students' enjoyment and keenness to learn.
- Governance is strong with members using their expertise to challenge and hold leaders to account in the drive to constantly strengthen performance.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Expectations of what students can achieve are not always high enough for students of all abilities, including for the most able.
- In mathematics, teachers do not always insist students set out their work accurately and neatly.
- Not all teachers use the available information they have to tailor tasks to the different abilities of students.
- Teachers identify in their marking how work can improve but students do not always correct their errors and so some misconceptions remain.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 32 lessons, including 11 paired observations and work scrutiny carried out with members of the senior leadership team. In addition, the inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons and undertook learning walks around the academy in order to check the quality of what is provided for students.
- The inspectors spoke with students and had discussions with the headteacher, subject leaders, staff, governors, and the chairman of the Longfield Trust and a national leader of education who provides external evaluation of the academy’s performance.
- The inspectors also examined a range of documents including those related to safeguarding, the academy’s view of how well it is doing, the monitoring of staff performance, the academy’s improvement plan and records relating to students’ progress and behaviour.
- The inspectors took account of 54 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and 64 responses to the inspection questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Clive Petts, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Philip Hyman	Additional Inspector
Georgiana Sale	Additional Inspector
Barbara Waugh	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized secondary academy.
- Most students are of White British backgrounds, with a very few who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- Currently, close to one half of the students are disadvantaged and therefore eligible for pupil premium funding. This is much higher than the national average. This funding is for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- A very few pupils are from service families and are supported through the services premium.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- There is no regular timetabled alternative provision away from the academy site, apart from short-term placements for a very few students attending the local authority pupil referral provision.
- The academy provides a breakfast club each day for students.
- The academy has experienced a large turnover in staff, including middle leaders since the previous inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching even further to ensure it is always inspiring and increases students' progress and attainment especially in mathematics by:
 - raising expectations even higher of what students of all starting points can do, especially the most able
 - using the good quality information available about students' progress to provide tasks that consistently match their need and stretch their knowledge and understanding
 - providing help that is specific to subjects and pinpoints gaps in students' learning; ensuring they respond to demands to correct mistakes
 - improve the accuracy of layout and presentation in students' work in mathematics
 - increase students' work rate even more through the use of inspiring and engaging activities.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The dynamism and gritty determination of the headteacher to improve academy performance has led to significant turnaround since the previous inspection. Reflective and self-critical leaders and managers maintain an unrelenting focus improving the quality of teaching.
- Staff share a common sense of purpose. Middle leaders are effective. They carry out their responsibilities assiduously and are increasingly well equipped to sustain the improvements made in their subject areas.
- Staff and leaders all work diligently to ensure that all students have an equal chance of achieving success. Staff foster good relations and make certain that discrimination in any form does not exist or hinder students' development.
- Rigorous systems check students' progress and attainment and monitor the quality of teaching and classroom support. The analysis and evaluation of the resulting information is precise and accurate. This information is used well to inform improvement priorities, but it not always clearly summarised and presented in a concise way.
- The training and nurturing of staff skills and talents, including those of the newly qualified, is given a high priority. Senior leaders' expectations of performance are high and the bespoke training and support that is provided is matched extremely well to academy priorities and the needs of individuals. Performance management is robust and ensures there is no automatic pay progression. As a result, teaching and the quality of classroom support is continuously improving and assessment is becoming more accurate. Nevertheless, some weaker aspects in marking remain such as responding to requests for corrections.
- The good curriculum is broad and varied. An appropriate range of academic and vocational options are provided. The values of tolerance, respect, fair play and free speech are well embedded reinforcing British values effectively. Helpful careers guidance and information prepares students well to make well-thought-out choices for the next stage of their education, training or employment. Almost all students successfully progress to employment, training and education.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to enable disadvantaged students to catch-up and close the attainment gaps between them and other students. Consequently, gaps in English have almost been eliminated and are closing steadily in mathematics. A broad and interesting range of enrichment activities broaden students' experiences and add to their enjoyment. This can be seen in much improved levels of attendance and enjoyment.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements, and day-to-day practice to keep students safe and protect them is effective. This includes the robust checking of attendance, achievement and the behaviour of students, including those educated off-site.
- The academy is accessible and encourages positive links with parents. External national leaders of education are used very effectively to help corroborate the academy's judgements of its performance and identify those areas which require further improvement.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The effectively led governing body is highly committed to school improvement. This is evident in the high level of challenge they present to senior leaders to help drive the academy forward. The wide range of governor's expertise, complimented by the chair of the Longfield Trust, ensures they have a detailed grasp of students' progress data and accurate insight into school performance. Governors have an accurate view of the quality of teaching. They play a full part in performance management practice and makes sure that it is rigorous. Governors monitor the use of pupil premium funding effectively to ensure it has the desired impact. Since the previous inspection, governors have given the headteacher total support when difficult staffing decisions have had to be made.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Students arrive ready for their lessons and are prepared to follow routines and work hard. They are keen and eager, especially when learning is inspiring and thought-provoking. Lessons proceed smoothly with any form of disruption uncommon, although when learning is less effective the level of engagement can drift a little.
- Students behave well in classrooms and at social times. The atmosphere in classrooms is positive and harmonious, enhanced by excellent staff professional models. This includes in the breakfast club. They take pride in the academy's and their own achievements and success.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- The academy provides high quality care including for those potentially vulnerable and the disabled. Students are well informed about bullying in its different forms, including cyber-bullying. They report that any inappropriate behaviour is promptly dealt with by staff and any issues resolved. They have a good grasp of what constitutes risk and danger, such as when using new technology. They demonstrate that they are sensible and safety conscious. Almost all parents in their online responses feel that their children are well looked after.
- Rigorous routines are in place to ensure that students attending alternative provision off-site are safe and behave well.
- Robust procedures are in place to check students' attendance. As a result, attendance is improving year-on-year and is now above the national average with a low number of students who are persistently absent.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is good and occasionally inspiring and exciting. Senior leaders have maintained a sharp focus upon improving learning over the past two years. Approaches to tackling underperformance have been uncompromising. Consequently, teaching is improving strongly across all subjects.
- Usually, expectations of what students of all abilities and starting points can achieve are rising steadily and are sometimes high. For example, in a food technology class younger students were observed totally engaged analysing their baked products, thinking critically and recording their results and deductions. They applied their information and communication technology skills in refined and sophisticated ways to enhance the quality of their portfolios. However, from time to time, expectations of what students can achieve, including for the most able and talented are not always consistently high enough.
- When engaging tasks lead to rapid progress and high achievement:
 - thought-provoking, challenging tasks are set for students of all abilities and backgrounds
 - students' progress information is used skilfully to pinpoint gaps in their knowledge and understanding and tailor activities to closely match individual needs
 - questioning follows students' thinking closely and constantly checks and stretches their understanding
 - tasks capture students' interest and inspire them to think critically, make decisions and explain their thinking in well-reasoned ways.
- At times when progress is a little variable and requires improvement:
 - the work set is insufficiently challenging, because it is not well enough matched to students' abilities
 - tasks lack that essential trigger to spur a desire for knowledge and hold students' interest
 - students are too reliant upon the teacher or classroom assistant and not encouraged enough to persevere and work things out for themselves.
- In learning when achievement is high, such as in English, inspiring and sometimes rousing teaching captures students' imagination and constantly stretches their thinking and adds to their understanding. For example, a class of students were observed completely engrossed discussing and considering the emotions and prejudices exposed by the main characters in the novel, 'Of Mice and Men'. Nevertheless, inspirational and imaginative approaches which promote high achievement are not shared widely enough in all subjects.
- The teaching of mathematics is good and improving steadily. However, it is not always made sufficiently clear to students precisely how they can improve the quality of their work, including the accuracy of the layout of their work in books.
- Normally, marking is frequent, helpful and informative. It is made clear to students how well they have done and clear guidance given for improvement. Students are expected to respond promptly to requests for corrections adding to the momentum of progress and the deepening of their understanding. However, students do not always correct their work consistently enough. Opportunities are sometimes missed to provide sufficient subject specific advice and a number of well-defined steps for improvement to quicken progress even more.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- The senior leadership's firm focus upon improving the quality of teaching and eliminating underperformance is leading to much improved rates of students' progress and higher achievement. Increasingly, improvements are being consolidated and sustained over time leading to a clear trend of rising attainment.
- Typically students start the academy with broadly average skills. Although in the 2014 GCSE examinations the proportion of students attaining five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics was a little below the national average, by the end of Year 11 best entry GCSE results revealed that the proportion was above average. In English, as a consequence of often inspiring teaching achievement was high.
- Patterns of progress in the current Year 11 reveal that students make good progress, because teaching is more consistently challenging across subjects. As a result, attainment is rising appreciably in most subjects. For example, in textiles current GCSE predictions, confirmed by inspection evidence, reveal that a majority of students are on course to attain a good GCSE grade in line with the national average, reversing the low attainment evident in the 2014 results. Nevertheless, some variations remain.
- Decisive action has improved teaching. Current academy information supported by inspection evidence reveals the positive impact of school action. Current Year 9 students are on track to achieve well with the progress rates in Year 7 and Year 8 quickening markedly. In the current Year 11, the proportion of students making more than expected progress exceeds national averages; this is leading to above average attainment. This considerable rise is a direct consequence of the academy's drive to eliminate underachievement.
- The much improved teaching is ensuring a more regular pattern of good progress for the most able students. Increasingly, activities incorporate higher order challenges which encourage students to think critically and unravel problems or dilemmas. Consequently, their achievement is rising quickly and this is reflected in the increased proportions of students who are on target to attain A* or A grades. In both English and mathematics, more than the national proportion of students are on course to gain A* or A grade, although it is higher in English than in mathematics. This is because at times the level of challenge in mathematics is a little variable, which slows students' progress.
- The gaps in performance between disadvantaged students and their classmates are narrowing, rapidly in some subjects. In English, at the end of Year 11, disadvantaged students attained the same grade as non-disadvantaged students nationally and about one half a grade lower than other students in the academy. In mathematics, the wide gaps are closing quickly. In 2014, students attained close to one and a half grades lower than others, both nationally and within the academy. Current academy information, validated by inspection evidence, confirms that gaps in English are on course to be almost eliminated with their classmates by the end of the current Year 11 and halved in mathematics. This is because these students make good and sometimes rapid progress.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is having an extremely positive impact on the achievement of those students entering the academy with skills in reading, writing and mathematics that are below that typical for their age. Careful pinpointing of students' needs coupled with successful methods, such as in the teaching of reading, ensure at least good progress and rapid closing of gaps in their skills.
- Students who are disabled or with special educational needs make good progress from their individual starting points because their intervention and support is carefully matched to their abilities and needs.
- The academy does not now make widespread use of early entry to GCSE examinations. Current practice is considered with a clear focus on a case by case basis when it is judged to be in the interests of the individual student, including the most able and talented.
- Students who are educated off-site in the local authority pupil referral unit for part of their curriculum time make good progress, especially in their personal development.

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	137222
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	463001

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	888
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Read
Principal	Susan Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	7 November 2013
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