

Lonsdale School

Brittain Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 8UT

Inspection dates 26–27 January 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Early years provision | Good |
| 16 to 19 study programmes | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Inadequate |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Rigorous action has been taken to address all safeguarding concerns raised at the last inspection. As a result, safeguarding is effective.
- The determined leadership of the headteacher and members of the senior team has led to rapid improvements in the outcomes and opportunities for pupils since the last inspection.
- The quality of assessment is a real strength of the school. It gives teachers and leaders a powerful tool to measure progress.
- The governing body have a secure understanding of their school and regularly challenge leaders about the impact of their work.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. The ambitious and supportive vision established with staff, has resulted in high aspirations for pupils and confidence they can be achieved.
- Teaching assistants are highly capable and support pupils well to access their learning. Teaching is effective and intuitive.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils value their education and take pride in their work and school.
- Provision in the early years is good and skilfully gives children a good start in developing their communication skills.
- Provision in the sixth form is good. Teaching is highly effective for the range of learners and is supported by strong leadership, and arrangements made for pupils to move on to college are strong.
- Leaders make effective use of the additional government funding to strengthen pupils' academic, personal and social development.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Leaders do not as rigorously check the progress of pupils who are taught by specialist staff from other schools.
- Pupils cannot yet access appropriate specialist facilities and trips in line with their curriculum options.
- Leaders' work to extend the range of exams taken is in the early stages of development. Leaders, staff and pupils accept that this needs more work.
- Children in the early years do not have sufficient access to outdoor play areas to enhance their independent play.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the rigour with which leaders quality assure the progress of pupils when they are being taught by specialist staff from other schools.
- Develop further the quality of the provision for pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage by developing outdoor play provision.
- Improve the quality of pupils' progress by ensuring that:
 - there are more opportunities for pupils to access specialist facilities and trips to support the curriculum
 - the examination options offered to pupils are appropriately wide ranging.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The exceptional leadership of the headteacher and members of the senior team has led to improvements in all aspects of the school's work. They set ambitiously high standards for all staff and ensure that these are met. Leaders are good role models for staff and, in turn, staff are positive role models for their pupils.
- Leaders' checks on the work of staff and progress of pupils are rigorous. They are good at identifying where changes are needed and rapidly take the right actions to secure success. As a result, leaders' and governors' evaluations of the school's effectiveness are accurate and they have an increasingly clear vision for improvement. On occasions, the progress of a small number of pupils, whose learning takes place elsewhere, is not as rigorously checked.
- Leaders at all levels, including middle leaders, are having a positive impact on the quality of teaching which has improved significantly since the last inspection. They lead by example and provide highly effective challenge and support for teachers.
- Leaders are ambitious about the future of their pupils and are constantly striving to prepare them to play an active role in all aspects of society. Individual liberty and tolerance are apparent in all aspects of school life. Staff emphasise the importance of equality for everyone and disability is not a limiting factor to access and excellence. As a result, dignity and respect are common values seen in and out of the classroom. Pupils actively care for one another and for the staff around them. They are inquisitive yet welcoming of all new people.
- Leadership of the new progress recording system is exemplary. Leaders make sure that pupils' achievement is tracked accurately and in detail, which plays a key role in improving teaching, the curriculum and pupils' outcomes.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 and post 16 has developed significantly with opportunities for pupils to access an appropriate range of examination courses. Pupils say that they are enjoying the new opportunities offered through the GCSE courses, but would like to see more available, in a broader range of subjects. Inspectors agree with leaders that the school needs to continue to develop partnerships with local schools with specialist facilities if they are to meet the increasing aspirations of their most-able pupils. The curriculum at other key stages meets pupils' needs well, including in the early years.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. Pupils have opportunities to engage with the wider community in key projects such as business and enterprise. Tolerance, respect and equality are consistently expected by all staff at all times; pupils respond well to these high expectations. They learn about right and wrong and develop the skills of independence and self-confidence in their learning. The work of some pupils in developing learning strategies, such as the use of eye-gaze, reflects extraordinarily high levels of pupil resilience, concentration and determination.
- Pupils' learning opportunities are extended through additional activities both in and out of school. For example, a number of pupils access a music-based curriculum managed by the music service; this is an accredited course and offers pupils the opportunity to work alongside their mainstream peers. The activities are well matched to their individual needs. However, pupils say that other trips and visits are not always as tightly focused on their programmes of study. For example, in addition to opportunities to develop their sports skills through trips, pupils would like GCSE-related visits such as those to museums to extend their knowledge of history.
- Leaders' checks on teachers' performance are thorough and regular. Teachers are rightly held to account for the achievement of the pupils they teach. Teachers receive useful feedback about how to improve, which leaders follow up in subsequent observations.
- Disadvantaged pupils' strong achievement demonstrates that leaders spend pupil premium funding effectively on a range of activities and strategies which support them to achieve well.
- School leaders have made very good use of the effective support offered by the local authority and external consultants, including one from the adjoining mainstream school. However, as the school has improved, this support has rightly reduced.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governance of the school is good. The governors conduct regular visits to the school and offer insightful challenge. They work well with the leadership to ensure that teacher performance is rewarded and that finances are well managed.

- The governors have a clear understanding of how pupil premium is spent and how this impacts on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. However, their knowledge of the progress of the most-able pupils lacks equal rigour.
- Governors are rightly ambitious for their pupils. They demonstrate a good understanding of the transition support and the increasing opportunities available to Lonsdale pupils when they move on to post-18 education.
- The governors demonstrate a thorough understanding of the strengths of the school and have a clear vision for improvement.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders liaise well with the relevant external agencies if there are any safeguarding concerns about pupils. Policies are up to date, and are reflected in the practice of all staff. As well as regular training on all aspects of keeping pupils safe, most staff have received training on keeping pupils safe from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. Governors ensure that they carry out their statutory duties effectively.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The effective and well-trained staff work with thought and respect for all pupils, keeping them at the centre of all they do. They are committed to helping all pupils achieve their aspirations. Staff appreciate leaders' feedback about their work, and respond well to challenges to improve. Consequently, most teaching is consistently good or better.
- Teachers have a very clear understanding of pupils' individual needs; these needs are often complex. They make effective use of the new accurate and detailed information about pupils' achievement. They set challenging targets and plan work which closely matches the needs and starting points of pupils. This effective planning ensures time is rarely, if ever, wasted. As a result, pupils make at least expected progress and sometimes make very rapid progress in specific areas of their learning.
- The patience of all staff ensures that all pupils have the opportunity to voice their opinions and make decisions about the next steps in their learning. In one lesson, where personal development skills were creatively being accessed through drama, the teacher perceptively met the emerging needs of pupils. She used a range of strategies that best suited their individual needs. As a result, pupil engagement and learning was greatly enhanced.
- Learners make good progress in their physical development from their individual starting points. For example, they have regular and frequent opportunities to actively take part in sports such as archery and wheelchair activities. The school makes effective use of additional funding to increase the breadth of sporting activities made available to pupils. These include additional activities such as visits to meet inspirational Paralympians and taking part in sporting activities alongside able-bodied peers.
- Teaching assistants have exceptional knowledge and skills relating to the needs of their pupils. They offer just the right amount of support to ensure that pupils work as independently as possible. They are almost always well informed about the learning activities and understand how to adapt these to meet the needs of the pupils they work with. As a result, the complex physical needs of pupils are seamlessly addressed during lessons.
- The excellent relationships between staff and pupils ensure that classrooms are vibrant and happy places where, in the main, pupils are engaged in their learning. Well-planned learning activities meet their needs and move them towards the aspirational targets which staff have set.
- Occasionally, the highest-attaining pupils are offered opportunities outside of the school environment or are taught by external staff. Pupils say they relish these opportunities and would like more of them. However, leaders agree with inspectors that they now need to ensure that the accuracy and detail of the assessments made by outside support is of the same high quality as the school's own assessment information.
- Evidence gathered on parents' views shows that they believe the school has a keen interest in the welfare of their children and provides good opportunities for parents to communicate with staff.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The welfare of pupils and their development is of paramount importance to leaders. Leaders promote a culture and ethos of support and open communication, where pupils know that staff will listen to them

carefully and wait for them to respond. As a result, pupils have high levels of trust in staff. Pupils listen thoughtfully to the opinions of others, and take into account friends' feelings and thoughts.

- The school is a welcoming and vibrant environment in which to learn and keep safe. Staff and pupils work well together to ensure that pupil safety and well-being is a high priority. Risk assessments are appropriate and effective, including when using a wide range of equipment and resources such as in the swimming pool, using sports equipment and much more. Pupils' entry and exit to school is managed effectively, so that pupils are not rushed and are treated with dignity.
- The majority of pupils enjoy coming to school and attend regularly. Sometimes pupils' physical difficulties or medical needs require them to be absent for an extended period of time, for a hospital stay or recuperation. The school works closely with its appointed NHS doctor to ensure that all absence is appropriate, and to encourage pupils back to school as soon as medical professionals agree.
- Pupils' independent skills are consistently developed in all they do. They have frequent opportunities to make choices and play a full part in their learning. Pupils' resilience is well developed. School leaders recognise that pupils are less resilient when participating in external activities, such as sports trips, and have suitable plans in place to develop this.
- Staff liaise effectively with healthcare professionals to ensure that pupils' medical and physical needs are best met. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe both in and outside of school. They have a good understanding of the risks involved when using a wide range of technology.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' general behaviour is good at all times. In social times, they show support for one another and are encouraged to be independent. In the lunch period seen, pupils were only supported in feeding where appropriate. Pupils, where they could, were encouraged to use cutlery appropriately, cut their own food and communicate with one another. They waited patiently in lunch queues, making active choices from the food options available. Pupils talked about the healthy food on their plates and why certain foods were not good for you, if eaten in excessive amounts. They respond well to the quality supervision at lunchtimes and enjoy the company of their friends.
- Pupils generally behave well in lessons because they are engaged in interesting and well-considered activities. However, in the few instances where teaching is not as strong, pupils are too willing just to sit and wait for the lesson to start. As a result, their progress is not as rapid as it could otherwise be.
- Adults make effective use of the information provided to them about pupils' particular behavioural needs. This ensures that pupils' behaviour is good most of the time. Where incidents occur, these are well recorded and appropriate actions taken, which results in improving behaviour.
- Pupils and staff agree that incidents of bullying are rare, but if they happen they are dealt with promptly and effectively. Records show that staff have up-to-date training and are well equipped to pre-empt and de-escalate challenging behaviour. As a result, physical intervention is not often needed.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils' work shows that they try hard and put a great deal of effort into their learning. They have high aspirations, which are in the main realistic. Pupils make excellent progress in their communication, independence and self-help skills. As a result, pupils are able to self-manage the high expectations staff have of them.
- Pupils make good progress in all key stages. While some pupils make rapid progress and achieve very well, a minority could make better progress if challenged more appropriately. This is particularly the case for the most-able pupils.
- Teachers' checks on pupils' progress are regular and thorough. Teachers and leaders constantly adapt what they do and how they present work, so that the achievement of the few pupils who make slower progress is good. However, these checks are less rigorous when pupils complete their work when attending other schools and colleges. Leaders realise this, and are working well with staff and leaders from other schools to develop appropriate records.
- Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as other pupils in the school. School information shows that high-quality assessments are carried out when pupils arrive at the school so that effective individual plans can be put in place. This enables pupils to make rapid progress and develop significant confidence in their learning.

- Disadvantaged pupils make very good progress. There is no discernible difference between their achievement and that of other pupils in the school. Additional funding is used well. For example, funds have been used to provide a specialist tutor in a subject where the school does not have the appropriate specialism. At the last inspection, the school did not enter any pupils for external examinations. The current Year 11 pupils are the first group who will have the opportunity to take accredited courses. This is a significant improvement in opportunity for all pupils.

Early years provision

is good

- Children make good progress in the early years.
- Children are effectively supported to develop their communication and resilience skills. Staff appropriately develop the early use of alternative technology. Assessment evidence and children's behaviour in lessons show a clear emphasis on developing strategies such as eye-gazing, which are critical for the future progress of some children. Skilled strategies are employed by staff to ensure that children are given increasingly challenging tasks which quickly develop their emerging skills.
- Teaching is led well and focused on meeting each individual child's needs. Learning journals show a significant improvement in the quality of the observations of children's learning since the last inspection. There are times when this evidence does not sufficiently identify what children need to do next to move their learning and development on further.
- Children are well cared for, happy and safe in this thoughtfully planned environment. They display a desire and willingness to engage and learn. Children are determined to access the available opportunities, and are not over supported. For example, inspectors observed a child overcoming significant barriers to his movement in order to access a toy. Adults in the room supervised him to ensure his safety, but showed patience in waiting for him to reach his goal. This type of approach results in resilient children who are keen to find independent methods to achieve their goals.
- The initial steps to develop the use of the outdoor learning area are already under way. However, this is not well enough developed to significantly support learning, so that children's early skills, resilience and independence are enhanced even further.
- Staff use appropriate resources well and creatively. Children are able to access these resources themselves and are happy to share them with their friends. They are confident in their classroom spaces and with the adults who help them. As a result, children are happy to work on their own, knowing help will be there if needed.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Learners attending the post-16 provision can access a range of courses at differing levels of accreditation including ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network), entry level, GCSE and BTEC. Early stages of A-level opportunities are being introduced. Learners make good progress across a range of areas and skills. They make good progress in English and mathematics from their individual starting points.
- Leaders work hard to ensure the curriculum provides a range of opportunities that allow learners to make good progress, appropriate to their age, ability and starting point, in their personal development. This includes work-related learning, for example the 'business enterprise' which involves learners travelling to a local Christmas market, often at the weekend, to sell the products they make to the general public.
- The school advocates in-school support between pupils. Many pupil volunteers, including those from the post-16 provision, were seen supporting their peers in a number of lessons. Learners say that they enjoy the responsibility and feel that they are learning about the needs of other pupils in far more detail. Pupils who are receiving this support appear to welcome it. The additional support has a direct impact on improving some pupils' pace of learning.
- Teaching is good. Teachers and teaching assistants understand the complex needs of individuals well. As a result, adults are able to challenge and support learners effectively. The relationships between adults and learners are very positive. Teachers liaise closely with parents to make sure that pupils follow appropriate units of work. Staff also make good use of external advice and support so they can make sure that learners move on to appropriate provision once they leave school.
- Transition arrangements to college are well managed. Pupils value the work the school does to give them the best opportunity to find the most appropriate placement, and the help they receive to support successful integration.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 117679 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10009960 |

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Community special |
| Age range of pupils | 3–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 87 |
| Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes | 21 |
| Number of boarders on roll | 20 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Helen Hanbury |
| Headteacher | Annemari Ottridge |
| Telephone number | 01438 726999 |
| Website | www.lonsdale.herts.sch.uk |
| Email address | admin@lonsdale.herts.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 22–23 October 2014 |

Information about this school

- Lonsdale School was opened in 1971 for pupils with physical and neurological disabilities. In January 2013, it moved to new premises adjoining Marriotts School, Stevenage, which is a mainstream high school.
- The current headteacher took up post in September 2014 following a period of temporary leadership for nearly a year.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs for physical and neurological disabilities.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is less than average compared with national figures. This extra government funding supports pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language is well below average.
- The early years is made up of a mixed Nursery and Reception class. All children are full time.
- No pupils access alternative provision.
- There is residential provision for pupils who wish to use this for up to four nights per week. This provision is inspected separately and therefore is not commented on in this report.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in the majority of classes, often alongside the deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors held meetings with school leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- They took account of the school's own parent questionnaire which was completed in response to a recent parent evening. They also analysed three case studies including the views of parents.
- Inspectors also held meetings with the headteachers of two local secondary schools with which the school has close links.
- They looked at a wide range of pupils' work and spoke with them about their learning and their thoughts about the changes to their school.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and reviewed a range of the school's documentation, including information about how well current pupils are doing and the school's own checks about its performance, together with paperwork relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Mary Rayner, lead inspector

Kim Pigram

Her Majesty's Inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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