

The Leigh Academy

Green Street Green Road, Dartford, Kent DA1 1QE

Inspection dates

15–16 November 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- During the last academic year, leaders have taken effective action to reorganise and strengthen leadership throughout the school. Senior and middle leadership are strong.
- Leaders have stabilised and improved the quality of teaching, which is now good overall. There are some inconsistencies in teaching, and not all pupils are supported or challenged enough to do their best, particularly the most able pupils. Teaching is stronger in key stages 4 and 5 than in key stage 3.
- There is an eagerness to learn across the school. Pupils are keen to acquire knowledge and skills, and teachers are willing to refine their practice. Pupils enjoy their learning and are positive about the school.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Strong relationships between staff and pupils help pupils feel secure and promote their personal development well.
- The rich curriculum offers pupils a wide choice of subjects. Pupils also benefit from a range of extra-curricular activities.
- Post-16 students achieve more strongly in vocational subjects than academic ones. Determined action has improved students' progress in a range of A-level subjects. Sensible changes to the curriculum, and the new, effective leadership, have further enhanced the post-16 provision, which is good.
- Actions taken by trust and school leaders to respond to the increased academic rigour of new examination specifications at key stage 4 were only partially successful. Provisional 2017 GCSE results show that the 2016/17 year group did not make good enough progress in some subjects. However, the effective work of leaders to improve teaching means that, currently, pupils are making good progress.
- The standard of pupils' work is improving in most subjects. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress. The most able pupils have not achieved as well as they should.
- The astute governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and of those aspects which could be even better. Since April, a new chair of governors has increased the challenge to leaders to improve the end-of-key-stage outcomes. Together with new leadership appointments, this has provided fresh impetus to the drive for rapid improvement throughout the school.
- Evidence of the positive impact of leaders' actions, particularly at post-16, demonstrates secure capacity for further improvement. Effective support provided by subject specialists from Leigh Academies Trust has helped to improve teaching and learning.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Reduce the remaining inconsistency in the quality of teaching.
- Further raise achievement across the school, particularly that of the most able pupils.
- Strengthen leadership further through robust self-evaluation, including a sharper use of data to measure the impact of actions taken to improve pupils' progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The co-principals and leadership team are determined to provide a rich experience for pupils, which enables them to learn well and grow as individuals. Reorganisation of senior leadership roles and new appointments to the school during the last academic year are driving a renewed ambition for further improvement.
- Trust leaders have strengthened accountability throughout the school by reorganising the senior leadership responsibilities. The role of academy principal has been separated from leadership of the colleges within the school. This has helped the two co-principals to adopt a strategic focus across the school, and thus identify the priorities for improvement more precisely.
- The leaders of the four colleges are held accountable for the progress and well-being of the pupils in their college, as well as also having a whole-school responsibility. The newly appointed assistant heads of college provide additional support for pupils' pastoral care, as well as identifying and supporting pupils in danger of falling behind. This close attention to pupils' development, coupled with strong relationships within the colleges, fosters a sense of belonging which pupils enjoy and which helps them to feel safe and secure.
- Leaders, including governors, are passionate about providing a curriculum which inspires and motivates their pupils. Pupils are able to choose from a wide range of subjects, both at GCSE and in the post-16 provision. This is supported by high-quality, impartial careers advice. Originally founded as a technology college, the school provides a curriculum which retains a high proportion of vocational, practical and creative subjects. Commendably, pupils are also able to study for triple sciences and two languages. Most pupils take at least one language at GCSE. The curriculum is enriched by an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, well used by pupils, especially in sport, drama, music and art. Pupils told inspectors how much they also valued the extra catch-up sessions for all subjects.
- Leaders have taken a few years to adjust the curriculum and approaches to teaching to better meet the demands of the more academically rigorous key stage 4 examinations and new national performance measures. Outcomes in 2016 and 2017 show that, while pupils made good progress in some subjects, they did not make consistently good progress across the full range of subjects. However, changes to pupils' subject choices and improvements in teaching mean that current pupils in key stage 4 are making good progress, and the school's performance information indicates that Year 11 pupils are on track to perform better in next year's examinations.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong and is embedded throughout the curriculum, particularly through personal, social, health and economic education lessons. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain through the successful promotion of British values throughout the curriculum and a strong sense of equality.
- Leaders are realistic about the challenges they face to recruit and retain high-quality staff. The trust sensibly offers leadership development programmes and works closely with teacher-training providers to support trainee teachers and fill teaching vacancies.

Over time, these strategies have stabilised teacher turnover and grown the school's own capable leaders, as well as attracting high-calibre leaders from elsewhere to join the school.

- Subject leaders show strong expertise and a determination to improve the quality of teaching and learning further. As a result of their higher expectations, teaching overall is good, although some variation in the quality of teaching persists across and within subjects. Some pupils still carry a legacy of previously poor teaching and require help to address misconceptions and gaps in their knowledge. The positive impact of subject leadership on the quality of teaching is greatest in post-16 and key stage 4, but pupils in some subjects in key stage 3 are sometimes insufficiently challenged and supported.
- Senior leaders are well aware of strengths and relative weaknesses in teaching and provide regular and successful training to improve the quality of teaching further.
- Throughout the school, staff are hard-working and committed to ensuring that pupils thrive, feel safe and gain the confidence they need to achieve well. Newly qualified teachers and those new to the school are well supported. Performance management systems make expectations clear, and leaders act decisively if these are not met.
- Additional funding for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is spent effectively to improve the progress of pupils. Leaders make sure that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are given appropriate support to address their learning needs.
- Leaders use pupil premium funding well to improve the progress, overall, of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school. However, the progress made by the most able pupils in the school, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, is lower than other groups.
- Of the parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, most would recommend the school to other parents. The school is oversubscribed for admission into Year 7.

Governance of the school

- Members of both the trust and the local governing body are very proud of the achievements of the school. They are committed to providing an educational experience which motivates and inspires pupils and prepares them well for their next steps.
- Governors and trustees bring a wide range of experience to the different levels of governance within the trust. Governors are aware of the school's strengths and also areas which could be improved. They are ambitious for the school and have the necessary expertise to both support and challenge leaders.
- However, previously, governors and trust executive officers have held an over-optimistic view of the school's performance, based on local comparisons, rather than how their pupils' outcomes compare with other pupils with the same starting points nationally. The new chair of governors, appointed in April, has brought a renewed challenge to school leaders to improve end-of-key-stage outcomes. This is leading to a sharper evaluation of the impact of leaders' actions on the rates of pupils' progress.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders' emphasis on pupils' well-being has ensured a culture of safeguarding which permeates the school community. Safeguarding systems and practices are very well organised. Statutory procedures for checking the suitability of staff to work with children are efficiently managed.
- Leaders ensure that regular training and updates about safeguarding are effective. Staff have good communication with parents and other agencies should they be worried about a pupil. Pupils state that they feel safe and well cared for at school and there are adults they would talk to if they have any problems.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching and learning continues to improve and this has helped to drive up the achievement of current pupils. Enthusiastic teachers show strong subject knowledge and teach in a lively manner to engage pupils. Strong relationships between staff and pupils build high levels of trust. This encourages pupils to participate confidently in a range of activities that help them learn. Pupils are keen to learn and told inspectors how much they enjoy their lessons overall.
- Teachers plan together, using centrally produced subject resources as starting points. This consistency of approach helps pupils to learn securely. A range of activities enable pupils to maintain concentration. For example, in a Year 9 history lesson, pupils were fully engaged when investigating religion in Elizabethan times.
- Often, skilful questioning checks pupils' understanding and tackles misconceptions or gaps in pupils' prior knowledge. Teachers also use questions effectively to extend pupils, such as in a Year 10 French lesson, where pupils were guided well to use complex phrases and expressions. At other times, pupils are moved on to the next task before they have a secure understanding of the basic concepts.
- Teachers know their pupils well. They regularly check their pupils' progress through frequent assessments. There are examples of effective feedback from teachers, in line with the school's expectations. In these instances, pupils clearly understand what they have to do to improve and they act on this feedback. For example, pupils appreciate the precise advice given in art, which helps their understanding of composition. However, there are some instances when the assessment policy is not being used fully to help teachers plan the next steps in pupils' learning. In a few cases, pupils are not acting on the useful feedback given to improve their work.
- Where teaching leads to good progress, it takes close account of pupils' individual starting points and uses a range of strategies to meet their needs. However, where teaching is less effective, teachers do not consistently use assessment of pupils' progress to set work at an appropriate level. Sometimes, the most able pupils have to complete work at lower levels before going on to more challenging tasks, and so do not make as much progress as they are capable of. At other times, pupils are presented with challenging tasks which they are not yet equipped to tackle, or moved on too quickly, before they have a secure knowledge and understanding of the basics.

This is most evident in key stage 3.

- In most lessons, pupils are fully committed to learning. They settle quickly and, due to the consistency of delivery across the school, know what to expect. In a few instances, when tasks are not well matched to pupils' starting points, pupils lose interest and low-level disruption slows progress. Most teachers use the behaviour policy consistently.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. It is a strength of the school. The 'small school' structure, where pupils belong to one of four colleges, enables staff to know pupils well and respond rapidly and effectively to any concerns.
- Pupils' welfare and well-being have a high priority in the school. Diversity and difference are celebrated. The school provides highly effective support to vulnerable pupils.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They feel safe and are confident about saying what they think in a trusting atmosphere. Pupils know who to turn to if they have any worries. They report that, on the few occasions bullying takes place, they are confident that it will be dealt with adequately.
- The 'healthy minds' programme engages pupils well in a range of personal, social and health topics. School leaders have also introduced a programme of resilience training, which is helping to improve pupils' self-confidence in overcoming difficulties they encounter.
- A high proportion of pupils participate in a broad range of extra-curricular activities. These enable them to express themselves creatively and also gain valuable experience of team spirit.
- Pupils receive impartial and useful careers advice, information and guidance to support their next stages of development.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision. The school tracks their attendance and progress regularly to ensure that the programmes support the pupils effectively.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They wear their uniform with pride. The vast majority of pupils are polite and welcoming. Conduct around the school is orderly. Pupils are punctual to lessons and are ready to learn.
- The school's behaviour policy has been recently relaunched, taking account of the views of pupils, parents and staff. Pupils report that teachers apply the policy's expectations consistently. During lessons, the majority of pupils are attentive and work well together. When teaching does not sustain pupils' interest, the behaviour of a minority deteriorates, which slows other pupils' learning.

- Pupils' attendance is just above the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains stubbornly below national levels for all pupils. Staff are using a range of strategies to encourage pupils to attend, with some individual successes.
- The level of exclusions has declined over the last few years as behaviour has improved.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes are improving. Pupils start Year 7 with attainment similar to the national average. GCSE results in 2016 showed attainment and overall progress in line with pupils nationally. Even so, the published results did not take account of the high proportion of pupils who improved their grade when they retook English GCSE at the end of Year 11.
- Provisional GCSE results for 2017 show that overall rates of progress of all pupils, and disadvantaged pupils, were below those of all pupils nationally. However, subject leaders have carefully analysed the performance of pupils in the 2017 examinations and taken rapid action to adjust teaching. This has already improved the standard of work of current Year 11 pupils. Evidence from the school's performance information and work in books show that Year 11 pupils are making good progress.
- Pupils' progress by the end of key stage 4 has not been consistently strong across the curriculum. This is due to a number of factors. Leaders were committed to enabling pupils to study a wide range of vocational and creative subjects, which do not all contribute to the school's performance and accountability measures. The legacy of some weaker teaching limited pupils' achievement in some subjects, such as science. Previously, some of the strategies used to respond to new GCSE subject specifications which demand greater academic rigour were less effective than others. Necessary changes to teaching approaches have now been introduced. There is also some variability in attainment this year as a result of changes to the mathematics and English qualifications and numerical grading.
- Standards are rising across the school in many subjects as a result of sharper leadership and better teaching. The school's performance information, along with work seen during the inspection, shows that outcomes are rising and, overall, progress is good. Progress made by disadvantaged pupils is similar to that made by other pupils.
- Rates of progress vary between and within subjects and between year groups. Some pupils in Years 7 and 8 are not building rapidly on the skills and knowledge they brought from primary school. However, their positive attitudes to learning and the improving quality of teaching enable them to progress steadily.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities generally make good progress, due to high-quality provision. Effective support and intervention organised by the SEN coordinator meet pupils' learning needs well. Catch-up funding is used well to ensure that pupils who started Year 7 below national levels in English and mathematics make accelerated progress. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make strong progress.
- The development of pupils' literacy skills is a clear priority and every opportunity is taken across the curriculum to promote pupils' verbal and writing skills. Pupils read with confidence during lessons and in tutor time. In lessons, pupils of all ages are able to explain their thinking clearly.

- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make slower progress than other groups in the school. Work seen in lessons and in books shows that some of the most able pupils could be further stretched and challenged.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- At the end of 2016, the school met both the academic and vocational minimum standards. Students made strong progress in vocational subjects. Provisional information about 2017 outcomes shows that students continued to make strong progress in vocational subjects. Progress in academic subjects was much weaker but the overall performance in academic subjects improved, compared with 2016 results, although it remains below national comparisons.
- Leadership of the post-16 provision has become more stable. The new leader, in post since April, has increased expectations and rigour, including checking that students are well qualified for the courses they choose to study at post-16. Previously, some students with lower GCSE results did not achieve well on some A-level courses.
- Leaders have sensibly redesigned the post-16 curriculum to more appropriately build on pupils' starting points, interests and aspirations. Some less successful subjects have been discontinued and new ones introduced. From September 2017, over 80 students in Year 12 are following some International Baccalaureate courses, in addition to a range of vocational courses and A-level courses, which now have higher entry thresholds. Some students follow courses at other schools within the trust and this widens their choices further.
- The proportion of students who improve their grades when they retake GCSE English at post-16 is higher than national levels. The proportion who improve their GCSE grade in mathematics is in line with national levels.
- Teaching in the post-16 provision is good overall. During the inspection, teachers' secure subject knowledge and skilful questioning were effectively extending students' learning. However, there is variation between subjects. Performance management and effective subject training for teachers have led to improvements in some subjects, but leaders know that there is more to do.
- Regular, impartial careers advice enables students to be well prepared for the future. Participation in work experience is extensive. An increasing number of pupils are achieving their first choices in higher education, apprenticeships, training or employment.
- During their time in post-16 provision, students are provided with a range of experiences and opportunities that enable them to develop well. Students value the care and advice they receive, although they would like better provision for private study. A high proportion stay on from Year 12 to Year 13.
- Students' behaviour in post-16 provision is good. Students have positive relationships with their teachers and peers. Students are good role models for younger pupils and enjoy supporting them in a variety of ways.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 135297 |
| Local authority | Kent |
| Inspection number | 10041457 |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary (non-selective) |
| School category | Academy sponsor-led |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1,425 |
| Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes | 238 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair | Robert Findlay |
| Co-principals | Julia Collins and Faye McGill |
| Telephone number | 01322 620 400 |
| Website | www.leighacademy.org.uk/ |
| Email address | info@leighacademy.org.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 9–10 May 2013 |

Information about this school

- The Leigh Academy was one of the founding members of the Leigh Academies Trust in 2008. Governance of the school is through the Leigh Academy Board and the Leigh Academies Trust board.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is larger than the average-sized mixed secondary school. It is in an area where there are a number of grammar schools which recruit some of the most able pupils. The school is divided into four colleges internally, and younger pupils

experience some of their lessons within their college.

- The school shares expertise and accesses training and support across other schools in the Leigh Academies Trust.
- The proportion of boys is higher than the national average.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils from multi-ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is similar to the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is similar to the national average.
- A small number of key stage 4 pupils attend alternative provision at the North West Kent Alternative Provision and the Health Needs Hub.
- A small number of post-16 students receive part-time education at other academies within the trust.
- The school has a local-authority-funded unit for hearing impairment. There are currently four pupils in this.
- The school meets the government's floor targets, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 56 lessons across a range of year groups from Year 7 to Year 13. Nineteen of these were jointly observed with senior leaders. Inspectors visited a number of other classes.
- Inspectors looked at a range of pupils' work in lessons and a further selection of pupils' books were scrutinised. Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons, around the school and during breaktimes.
- Inspectors held meetings with the chief executive officer and deputy chief executive officer, the co-principals, other senior leaders, groups of middle leaders, teachers, governors and a board member of the trust.
- Inspectors took into account 99 responses to the confidential questionnaires received from staff and also met with individuals and groups of staff.
- The views of pupils were taken into account and inspectors met with groups of pupils, including sixth-form students.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents, taking into account 68 responses to the online Ofsted parent questionnaire, Parent View, including 44 free-text responses.
- Inspectors evaluated key documents, including the school's strategic planning documents, minutes of meetings, including governor and board meetings, reports of attendance and behaviour and records relating to pupils' safety and academic progress.

Inspection team

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Theresa Phillips, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Emma Sanderson | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Steve Baker | Ofsted Inspector |
| Keith Pailthorpe | Ofsted Inspector |
| Eliot Hodges | Ofsted Inspector |
| Anne Turner | Ofsted Inspector |

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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