

Inspection of Longfield Academy

Longfield Road, Darlington DL3 0HT

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 April 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils' behaviour at this school has deteriorated following pupils' return to the school after COVID-19. Although leaders recognised this decline, they have not done enough to tackle disruption to lessons. The number of behaviour incidents and suspensions is too high. Recent changes to the behaviour policy have led to some improvement for pupils. Lessons are starting to be disrupted less and staff are beginning to feel better supported to challenge poor behaviour.

Teachers at the school do not consistently get the best out of pupils. Although the curriculum is carefully planned in most subject areas, pupils are not yet benefiting from a good education. Expectations for pupils are not high enough. Where teaching is stronger, pupils focus well and remember more of their learning over time.

Pupils say that they understand about treating each other with respect. Despite this, instances of bullying occur. Some pupils say action is not taken when they report their concerns. Pupils spoken with say that feel safe at the school, but a significant minority of pupils do not respect their school environment. Vandalism, litter and the use of electronic cigarettes has led to areas of the school being put off limits to pupils at social times.

At this school, older pupils take on leadership opportunities and are proud of what they achieve. Pupils can take part in a range of careers activities to help them plan for their future.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

In most subject areas, leaders have developed clear curriculum plans. They have thought about the important knowledge and skills pupils will need to succeed in each subject. Some staff explain new concepts clearly, helping pupils to connect new ideas to previous learning. However, this is not always the case and as a result, gaps in pupils' knowledge remain.

Teachers do not adjust the curriculum well enough for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff have a limited understanding of the specific strategies to help these pupils. As a result, the needs of these pupils are not fully met.

Pupils do not have enough opportunities to read across different subjects. Some pupils say that they do not read widely and often. As a result, pupils do not have the chance to develop a strong vocabulary in some subject areas, which limits their understanding.

Some staff say that assessment processes at the school are not well planned. Leaders do not think carefully enough about how assessment data will be used to improve pupil outcomes. Staff do not always have sufficient time to act upon assessment information. As a result, gaps in learning are missed. Pupils are not remembering as much as they could of what has been taught.

Pupils and staff reported regular incidents of poor behaviour, including pupils roaming the corridors disrupting lessons to inspectors. Some parents shared their concerns that pupils' behaviour over time has not improved. School records indicate ongoing challenging behaviour around the school site. These include vaping, fights between pupils and truancy from lessons. As a result, certain areas of the school are off limits to pupils.

Recent changes to the behaviour system, including the introduction of a formal 'removal room', have begun to have an impact on reducing disruption. However, suspensions remain high. Some pupils continue to receive repeated sanctions which do not bring about improvements to their behaviour.

Pupils shared their concerns with inspectors about bullying, including the widespread use of discriminatory and offensive language. While pupils felt safe and knew a trusted adult they could speak to, they did not always feel their concerns were taken seriously.

The personal development curriculum requires improvement. Plans are in place to deliver a broad and balanced personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme but this is not well established. Leaders have started to address deficiencies in the personal development curriculum but staff have not had adequate training to deliver it. Processes in place to identify gaps in pupils' understanding about PSHE are not applied consistently. Although pupils are clear about accepting people of different faiths and backgrounds, and they could refer to work done in school to support this, for example for 'PRIDE' week, some pupils do not have a secure knowledge of British values or protected characteristics.

Careers provision is well developed. Pupils have opportunities to meet employers, attend careers events and receive unbiased careers advice. The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause. The needs of pupils with SEND have also been considered, additional careers visits and activities take place to support these vulnerable pupils.

Leaders have not ensured that the school has consistently improved over time. Plans for school improvement do not have clear enough targets. They are not reviewed regularly to check the impact. Leaders and governors do not have an accurate enough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Staff who gave their views during the inspection, do not feel well supported by leaders. They say that their workload and well-being are not taken into consideration. When staff views are collected, staff are not clear about how leaders are acting upon this feedback.

Governors and the trust board are not effectively challenging leaders to bring about improvement. They rely too heavily on what they are told is taking place in school. While governors and leaders have a clear vision for improving the school, they require further training to successfully support school leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have clear systems and processes in place to safeguard pupils at the school. They work closely with a range of external agencies to support pupils and their families. Safeguarding leaders ensure pupils' well-being is a key priority across the school and provide daily safeguarding updates.

Staff receive regular training that helps them to identify potential risks to young people. This includes specific risks in the local area. Staff know the most vulnerable pupils in school well. Leaders take concerns raised by staff seriously and act swiftly to support pupils most in need.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Provision for pupils with SEND is not well developed. As a result, some pupils with SEND cannot access the curriculum as well as their peers, and consequently are not achieving as highly as they could. Leaders should ensure that teachers have clear strategies for supporting the differing needs of pupils with SEND. Leaders should provide training on these strategies and monitor their impact.
- Assessment processes are not well planned with clear links to the intended curriculum. This means that staff do not effectively use assessment to identify gaps and help pupils know and remember more over time. Leaders need to consider their assessment rationale and ensure there is adequate time to address pupil misconceptions before the next assessment window.
- Leaders have not supported staff sufficiently to ensure that poor behaviour is consistently dealt with. This has led to pupils' learning frequently being disrupted and a high number of suspensions. Recent improvements to behaviour systems must be sustained and their impact regularly evaluated.
- Pupils are not confident that if they reported bullying it would be effectively dealt with by staff. Instances of discriminatory and offensive language take place throughout the school. Leaders must ensure there is an effective and consistent approach to tackling bullying. Pupils must feel that their concerns are taken seriously by all staff and dealt with in a timely fashion.
- The personal development curriculum is effectively mapped out. However, the implementation of the curriculum is variable. This has led to some pupils having a

poor understanding of British values and protected characteristics. Leaders must provide further training for staff to enable them to successfully deliver the personal development curriculum.

- Leaders have not carefully monitored and evaluated aspects of weakness within the school. As a result, action to bring about improvements have been slow to take effect and some areas of weakness remain unaddressed. To ensure this rapidly improves, leaders should implement an effective school improvement plan, and monitor and evaluate the impact of their actions.
- Leaders do not take into consideration the views and opinions of all staff. This has led to some staff feeling overburdened and that their views are not listened to. To address this, leaders should check on staff well-being and workload and address any concerns.
- Trustees and governors do not effectively challenge leaders to improve the school's performance. They are not aware of the systems and processes used to monitor the school's effectiveness. As a result, they are not able to ensure sustained school improvement. Trustees and governors must ensure they have training to gain the skills and knowledge to rigorously challenge school leaders to bring about change.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	145577
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10227649
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	884
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Robert Bell
Headteacher	Nick Lindsay
Website	www.longfield.swiftacademies.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school has not previously been inspected since converting to an academy.
- The school is part of the Swift Academies Trust.
- The school uses two alternative providers, Outdoor Ambitions and the Darlington Learning Zone. Neither provider is registered with the Department for Education. A small number of pupils attend these providers.

Information about this inspection

The inspector(s) carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors spoke about the impact of the pandemic with leaders and took that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the chief executive officer of the trust, the head of school and senior leaders. They spoke to teaching and support staff. One inspector met with early career teachers and their mentors.
- Deep dives were carried out in English, science, history and geography. Inspectors spoke with curriculum leaders, visited lessons, looked at books alongside staff and spoke to both pupils and staff. Curriculum plans from maths, art and modern foreign languages were also reviewed.
- The lead inspector met with members of the local governing body as well as directors of the trust.
- Inspectors checked the school's safeguarding policies and procedures, including checks made on all adults who come on to the school site. Inspectors spoke with pupils and staff to ensure their understanding of safeguarding procedures. An inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead to check on their work to keep pupils safe in school.
- An inspector visited one of the alternative providers used by the school. Safeguarding, curriculum and attendance procedures were reviewed.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's parent, pupil and staff surveys, including free-text responses.

Inspection team

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