

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Lonsdale School

Brittain Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 8UT

Inspection dates:

28 and 29 January 2025

Outcome

Lonsdale School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at this school, they understand the importance of learning. They are empowered with the attitudes and strategies needed to overcome challenges. For example, pupils develop effective communication strategies and delight in conversation. Pupils listen carefully to the views of others and put across their own ideas articulately. Lessons and social areas buzz with thoughtful discussions.

Children in the early years happily explore the school's learning activities. During whole-class activities, they learn with focus and interest. Pupils work hard to reach the high aspirations they set for themselves. In lessons, they show determination. They persevere when they find something tricky to learn. Pupils, including students in the sixth form, achieve the aims of the school's ambitious curriculum.

Pupils value the caring ethos at the school. They build strong relationships with their peers and staff. Pupils show empathy and look out for each other. They notice when others are sad or upset and are quick to offer support. In lessons, pupils encourage others and celebrate their success.

Pupils develop talents and interests through the enrichment and extra-curricular provision available at the school. When leading clubs for their peers, they learn how to manage resources, time and people while sharing their interests with other pupils.

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

Since the previous inspection, the school has developed its curriculum successfully to ensure pupils can reach ambitious goals. For example, the way the school teaches reading has improved markedly. Pupils live up to the school's expectation that 'everybody reads.'

Starting in the early years, children develop their use of language and build their vocabulary. The school systematically teaches pupils what they need to become proficient readers. The school also provides books that match pupils' needs and interests. As a result, most pupils read fluently and enjoy reading.

The school's curriculum is well designed overall so that staff teach pupils knowledge in a logical order. This helps them build what they know over time. However, the school has not provided sufficiently clear guidance for some areas of the curriculum. This means that for some subjects, teachers do not know precisely what to teach and what knowledge must be reviewed over time. As a result, pupils sometimes do not learn key content securely.

Staff have a keen focus on the needs of each pupil and the progress pupils make. They use what they know about each pupil, and each student in the sixth form, to create effective learning activities. They routinely check what pupils know and can do. When pupils show signs of not learning something well enough, staff adapt their teaching well. As a result, pupils make strong progress through the curriculum and towards outcomes stated on education, health and care (EHC) plans.

Children in the early years learn the school's expectations of their behaviour. They share and take turns well. In lessons, pupils focus on their learning. They discuss their emotions clearly and manage negative emotions well. On the occasions when emotions become overwhelming, staff provide effective coaching so that pupils maintain positive behaviour. Lunch and social times are pleasant occasions when pupils enjoy each other's company. Students in the sixth form serve as effective role models of the school's values.

Overall, many pupils maintain regular attendance. The school builds partnerships with families and external agencies to find solutions when pupils struggle to attend. For example, the school works with medical professionals to help families manage healthcare appointments. This limits interruptions to pupils' learning at school.

The school prepares pupils well for adult life. Pupils are taught about the risks they face at home, in the community and when online. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and healthy, emotionally and physically. They have the confidence and know-how to deal with concerning situations. Pupils also learn strategies to live as capable young adults. For example, older pupils learn how to design and cook meals for themselves. Similarly, pupils are well equipped to live alongside those with different lifestyles or beliefs.

Pupils and students in the sixth form have aspirational career goals. They receive the guidance they need to make positive next steps into education, training or employment.

Governors have steered the school through substantial leadership changes over the last twelve months. The school now has a settled leadership team with sensible plans to develop the school. Governors ensure that they get the information they need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They hold leaders accountable for the quality of the school's provision and ensure improvements are made when necessary.

Parents and staff have positive views about the school. Parents value the way pupils enjoy school while learning and achieving well. Staff morale is high. They are proud of and enjoy working at the school. They appreciate how the school has helped them to maintain reasonable workload while also improving the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- For some subjects of the curriculum, the school's guidance for teachers does not identify exactly what pupils must learn. Consequently, teachers do not know precisely what they should teach and review in these subjects. This leads to pupils sometimes forgetting key knowledge. The school should define exactly what pupils must learn and remember and ensure that teachers revisit this important knowledge effectively.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in January 2016.

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.

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	117679
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10345215
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	129
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Chandra Green
Headteacher	Claudia Thiele
Website	www.lonsdale.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	5 and 6 November 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school provides education for pupils with physical disabilities. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The headteacher took up the post of acting headteacher in January 2024. She became substantive headteacher in September 2024.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the chair of the governing body, members of the governing body, the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, when moving around the school and during lunch and playtimes. Inspectors also considered a range of documents and other information about the behaviour, attitudes and personal development of pupils.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the responses to the staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Al Mistrano, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Michele Geddes

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2025