



Longdean School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117523
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290861
Inspection dates 13–14 December 2006
Reporting inspector Melanie Kavanagh HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Rumballs Road
School category	Community		Bennetts End, Bennetts End
Age range of pupils	11–18		Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP3 8JB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01442217277
Number on roll (school)	1002	Fax number	01442233098
Number on roll (6th form)	195		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Charles Bullen
		Headteacher	Mr Rhodri Bryant
Date of previous school inspection	21 January 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	13–14 December 2006	290861

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors over two days.

Description of the school

Longdean School is larger than many secondary schools and an increasing number of students continue their studies in the school's sixth form. Most students come from the surrounding Bennetts End and Nash Mills ward. The proportion of students with statements of special educational need is below average. The majority of students are from white British backgrounds with approximately 12% of Pakistani heritage. The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing which commenced in September 2004.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's self-evaluation that this is a satisfactory school and students are adequately prepared for the next stages in their lives. Students enter the school with broadly average attainment and make good progress and achieve well at Key Stage 3. In 2005 and 2006, the proportions of students gaining 5 or more GCSE passes at grades A* – C remained static and were below national averages. Standards and achievement at Key Stage 4 have improved for the current Year 10 and 11 students and they are now making at least satisfactory progress. Achievement and standards in the sixth form are satisfactory but the proportion of students reaching the highest grades is below national averages.

Students' personal development and well-being are good, as is care, guidance and support. Most students enjoy school and it provides a secure environment. Behaviour is generally good. Students have a good understanding of moral and ethical issues and are well aware of healthy lifestyles. Many of them participate enthusiastically in sporting activities. They take part in activities such as charity appeals enthusiastically and feel their views are well represented through the School Forum. The school works well with other agencies to support students. The progress of vulnerable students is monitored carefully. There is satisfactory support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the Speech and Language base provides good support for its small number of students.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and some aspects are good. Careful planning, the judicious use of information learning technology (ILT) and good use of questions and answers characterise the best lessons. Good practice is insufficiently shared to ensure consistently high quality teaching and learning for all students. In less effective lessons, teaching does not fully address individual students' needs. The curriculum is satisfactory. Collaborative arrangements between schools and the local college are effective in providing vocational options for Year 10 students and a wide range of subjects for students in the sixth form. The impact of the school's specialist status has been limited and is an area for improvement.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The recent changes that the school is undergoing have not yet impacted fully on all areas identified for development. Provision remains satisfactory rather than good in areas including teaching and learning. However, the impact on students' performance at Key Stage 4 leads inspectors to judge that the school has satisfactory capacity to improve. The headteacher's clear vision and strategy for improvement are well supported by staff and governors. The new school development plan provides a relevant and well informed agenda for improvement. The school knows its own strengths and weaknesses well and identifies them accurately in the self-evaluation report. Departmental self-evaluation varies in quality and rigour and has been identified by the school and inspectors as an area for improvement.

The majority of parents and carers who completed the questionnaire and contacted the inspectors were supportive of the school. Some parents and carers were highly

complimentary about the quality of care, support and communication with them. A minority reported concerns about behaviour and the effectiveness of the school's response to the views of students, parents and carers. Although the school's overall performance is satisfactory, performance in 2006 Key Stage 4 examinations was inadequate. Before its next Section 5 inspection, Ofsted inspectors may visit the school to monitor the progress it has made in remedying this weakness. The school would receive 2 – 5 days notice of such a visit.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The inspectors agree with the school that the effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form is satisfactory. The school has a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement of the sixth form and has identified accurately areas for development.

Progress is satisfactory, with most students achieving or exceeding their predicted grades. However, the proportion of students achieving grades A and B is below the national average. The curriculum in the sixth form offers a wide range of academic advanced level and vocational courses. Arrangements for collaborative provision between participating schools and the local college are well organised and ensure that students can study the subjects of their choice. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In many lessons students develop appropriate critical and analytical skills. In some lessons, there is insufficient emphasis on independent learning and aspiring to the highest standards of which students are capable. Students' progress is monitored and recorded well. Students enjoy their studies and are well supported both academically and at a personal level. The school has made successful efforts to broaden the horizons of the students with a range of cultural visits. The school is effectively assisting the students in developing into mature young adults.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sustain improvements to students' performance at Key Stage 4.
- Share and disseminate best practice in teaching and learning to secure consistently good lessons.
- Improve the rigour and accuracy of self-evaluation at departmental level.
- Ensure that specialist status has an increased impact on the school's provision.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Students enter the school with broadly average attainment. Targets set by the school for students to reach by the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are realistic and challenging. Students make good progress by the end of Year 9 and achieve well. Vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties make at least as good progress as other students.

In 2006, students' performance in Key Stage 4 examinations was inadequate. The proportion of students obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* – C in 2005 and 2006 remained below national averages. Boys with average or below average attainment made particularly slow progress. In 2005 and 2006 at the end of Year 11, standards in mathematics were above the national average and progress was good. However, standards and progress in English and science were lower. Standards in subjects such as, art, French, music, statistics, religious studies and sports studies were good and well above the national averages. Students made very good progress in these subjects.

The evidence obtained during the inspection shows that the trend of underachievement in Key Stage 4 has been reversed. The current Year 10 and 11 students are making at least satisfactory progress in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and good progress in a number of other subjects. There is clear evidence that the strategies put into place by the school to monitor, track and mentor the students to help them to reach and exceed their targets have secured significant improvements.

Standards and achievement in the sixth form are satisfactory. Students' progress in economics and business studies at advanced level are particular strengths. Attainment generally is close to the national averages, but the proportion of students reaching the higher grades A and B is below the national average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's view that students' personal development and well-being are good. Most display positive attitudes, enjoy school and feel valued. They are clear that any bullying will be treated seriously and dealt with fairly. The behaviour of most students is good in classes and around the school. However, a small minority of students disrupt the learning of others in a few lessons. The school has worked hard to improve attendance, which is now satisfactory, and this continues to be a priority for development. Students are well aware of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles and staying safe. They are particularly appreciative of, and participate well in, the range of sports on offer.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. They acquire a good understanding of social, moral and ethical issues. In citizenship lessons, for example, they develop a sensitive awareness of fair trade issues. The importance of respecting others is emphasised in assemblies. In discussion, students take issues of race equality and equal opportunities seriously. Spiritual development is satisfactory and the school has identified this as an area to improve further. Students respond generously to charity appeals. Earlier in the year a non uniform day raised a substantial sum of money, which the School Forum decided should be split between a local appeal and the Pakistani earthquake appeal. Sixth form students take part in a comprehensive community service programme. This includes working with younger students in lessons, assisting with school website maintenance and administrative work in the school office.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and some aspects are good. The very good practice that exists within the school is insufficiently shared. This leads to inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning and therefore to the progress that students make. The school has identified this weakness through extensive observation of lessons, but the impact of planned improvements has yet to be fully demonstrated. Lessons are planned carefully in order to make the best use of students' time. In many lessons, teachers use ILT effectively and convey successfully their enthusiasm and knowledge of their subjects. Activities are often matched closely to students' particular learning needs. Some teaching does not fully address students' individual needs and they make satisfactory rather than good progress. In such lessons, tasks given to students are insufficiently demanding and do not stimulate students' attention and engagement.

In the most effective lessons, teachers provide challenging activities that maintain students' interest and motivate them to do well. In these lessons students make good or excellent progress and they demonstrate good levels of independent learning. For example, students in Year 10 made good progress in understanding geographical features through the use of relevant and interesting video clips and interactive diagrams. Teachers often make good use of questions and answers to support and encourage students' confidence and knowledge. Working relationships between staff and students are good in most lessons. The school has worked hard to improve the assessment of students' work and has identified this as an area for further development. Students show a good knowledge of their target grades, but are less clear on the steps they need to take in order to achieve them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. In addition to the statutory provision at Key Stage 3, the school has provided further literacy and numeracy lessons for students entering the school with below average attainments in English and mathematics to help them improve. New vocational courses at Key Stage 4 have improved the motivation of the many Year 10 students involved. The content in individual subjects is not always matched closely enough to the differing abilities of students.

The sixth form curriculum benefits from a well organised and productive collaboration with other schools and the local college. The school offers a good range of activities outside lessons, particularly in sport. The specialist status of the school in mathematics and computing has had limited impact on the school as a whole. Changes designed to

improve progress towards meeting specialist status targets are too recent to assess their full impact.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support. Vulnerable students are monitored carefully. Liaison between the school and outside agencies is effective and ensures that students get good support. Child protection procedures are robust and the school ensures students' welfare and safety through careful attention to risk assessments and movement on site. The specialist speech and language base provides very good provision for the small number of students that it supports. The base's work is starting to have a positive impact on learning in other school areas of the school, for example by producing teaching resources that are targeted to individual students' needs. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities outside the speech and language base is satisfactory. Teaching assistants provide good help for individuals with learning needs, however there is inconsistent practice among teachers in challenging the most able and supporting the less able students in lessons. Good systems are in place for tracking students' progress and identifying those who are underachieving, as well as those who are doing well. The school keeps parents and carers regularly informed about their child's progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher provides strong and consultative leadership. The school is undergoing significant changes which have yet to impact fully on all the areas identified as satisfactory rather than good. For example, the insufficient sharing of good practice in teaching and learning has been identified by the school and appropriate actions planned and instituted. Inspectors agreed with the school's judgements on improvements needed. The urgent need to raise standards and achievement at Key Stage 4 has been prioritised. This is a crucial area where the school's efforts have had a successful impact and resulted in the better progress of students currently in Years 10 and 11.

The headteacher's clear vision and agenda for improvement is well supported by staff and governors. Senior managers have clearer lines of accountability and roles and responsibilities match their areas of expertise well. The recently introduced school development plan (SDP) provides targets linked to priorities for improvement. Actions and outcomes identified in the plan are clear, measurable and time limited. The senior leadership team works well together to achieve these targets and they understand clearly their contribution to improvements. Teaching and learning, raising standards and achievement and using self-evaluation are given the appropriate central focus.

The new SDP is not yet embedded fully for all staff as the key tool for driving improvements and informing individual performance plans.

The self-evaluation report (SEF) is self-critical. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in areas such as teaching and learning. Capacity to improve was given a higher grade than inspectors awarded as the school relied too much on planned improvements and not enough on the impact of changes. The variable quality and rigour of self-evaluation at departmental level has been identified accurately by the school as an area for development.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors are committed to the school and know the priorities for improvement. There is good promotion of equal opportunities with previously under performing groups identified and outcomes improved to satisfactory or better. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

15 December 2006

Dear Students

Longdean School, Rumballs Road, Bennetts End, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP3 8JB

As you know, your school was inspected recently and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. Firstly, thank you for your openness and contribution to the inspection. We enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your comments and opinions.

The inspection found that yours is a satisfactory school. The test results at the end of Year 9 show that students make good progress. In the sixth form, most students achieve their predicted grades. In recent years, the number of students gaining 5 or more A* - C passes at GCSE has been below national averages. Your headteacher and teachers have worked hard to improve this and we found that students in Years 10 and 11 are now making at least satisfactory progress. We have asked the school to continue to improve performance at Key Stage 4.

Your lessons are well planned and teachers work hard to make learning interesting and challenging. Most of you behave well, arrive at your lessons on time and enjoy learning. We have asked the school to make sure that all your lessons are equally interesting and meet your individual needs. You can help by working to the very best of your ability in all lessons, completing all your homework and listening carefully to your teachers. You told us that you feel safe in school and that you know where to get help if you are worried or feel that you are being bullied. Remember, your teachers will always help you with problems and you should go to them straight away if you, or a friend, need help. We were impressed with the fund raising in which you took part and your knowledge of issues such as fair trade and race equality.

Your headteacher is working with staff to improve the school further. One area we have recommended for improvement is the influence of the school's specialist status of mathematics and computing on provision more widely. Many of you show good skills with computers and we thought that the work you produced using computers was often good. Another area is to further develop departmental self evaluation so that all your subject leaders know exactly what needs to be done to improve.

We wish you well with your future studies.

Melanie Kavanagh

Her Majesty's Inspector