

Longfield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114322
Local Authority	Darlington
Inspection number	325990
Inspection dates	11–12 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Margaret Farrow HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed section 5 under the same Act

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	901
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Elizabeth Hart
Headteacher	Mr Keith Cotgrave
Date of previous school inspection	20 March 2006
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 26 lessons, and held meetings with staff, groups of pupils, and representatives of the governing body. They observed the school's work and looked at a selection of documentation such as school and departmental improvement plans, procedures for safeguarding pupils and a range of policies. They investigated systems the school uses for assessing pupils' achievement and monitoring their progress, analysed the school's test and examination results and the most recent attendance and exclusion data. Inspectors also conducted a book scrutiny and reviewed a number of case files that illustrated how the school works in partnership with parents and other agencies to support vulnerable pupils. 228 parents returned the Ofsted inspection questionnaire and their responses were also analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the impact of the school's actions to improve pupils' attainment and progress, particularly in English and mathematics
- the impact of leadership and management of the senior leadership team and beyond, including the impact of actions the school takes to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination
- the quality of the school's provision, particularly the curriculum and the impact of teaching on pupils' learning
- the impact of the school's work on pupils' enjoyment, achievement and well-being.

Information about the school

Longfield is a popular, average sized secondary school, serving the North Western area of Darlington local authority. Most pupils are White British and an average proportion is known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils deemed to have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is significantly above average while the proportion with a statement of special educational need is well below that seen nationally. A higher than average number of pupils who enter the school in Year 7 remain there until they leave statutory education at the end of Year 11. The school attained Sports College status in 2004 and achieved the International School's award and attained National Healthy School's Status in 2008.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Longfield is a good school with outstanding aspects including the curriculum, actions taken to safeguard pupils, and the support, care and guidance provided for them. It has made good improvement since the last inspection and has been resolute in its determination to live up to the school's motto; 'Achieving high standards by demanding excellence'. Following a period of staffing turbulence, when standards dipped, the headteacher has built strong, talented leadership and middle management teams which have provided a catalyst for the improvements in provision, the progress made by pupils and the standards now being attained.

Standards are improving because the school has a relentless focus on them. The outstanding curriculum provides secure pathways that meet pupils' individual needs and interests, and managers' effective efforts to improve lessons are generating quicker progress for pupils than previously. In addition, the robust tracking system enables staff to be clear about the actual amount of progress pupils make and to challenge any underachievement. Pupils join the school in Year 7 with broadly average attainment yet by Year 11 standards rise to above average compared with the country as a whole.

Getting to know and understand the needs of each pupil is at the heart of the school's work. Any challenges or difficulties they face are tackled immediately. They are well supported to be fully included into the life of the school. This commitment and improvements made since the last inspection ensures that the large majority of pupils achieve well. Pupils who are vulnerable, the small number of looked after pupils, traveller pupils, those from disadvantaged communities, and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities all make similar progress to their peers. However, the school knows that some pupils could do even better. As yet, not all teachers mark pupils work effectively or use the school's good assessment information to inform their planning or teaching methods. Consequently some pupils do not always understand what they need to do to improve and some are not always stretched to do their very best.

The school's sports specialism has been very effective in promoting pupils' good attainment and progress and specialist targets are met or exceeded. It contributes to pupils' excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lives and helps build their leadership skills, confidence and self-esteem. It also successfully supports local schools and increasingly the local community, through its outreach work and shared use of facilities.

Senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning accurately and as the roles of middle managers develop they are also becoming increasingly effective in monitoring the quality of teaching in their departments. Senior leaders have developed robust systems to evaluate the impact of the school's work. This informs well focused school improvement plans. Procedures involve, and take account of the views of, staff and governors; consequently all have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Morale is high, staff say they feel valued and supported and performance management procedures hold them effectively to account by making sure that all actions are focused on continuing improvement. The school has developed outstanding partnerships with a wide range of agencies to enrich pupils' experiences in school and help support them in times of need. The impact of such actions, together with strong leadership, and pupils' improved attainment and progress since the last inspection indicate the school has good capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Reduce the in-school variation in the quality of teaching by:
 - improving all teaching to the standard of the best in all departments
 - ensuring all teachers use the school's accurate assessment information when planning lessons, so that work is always matched to pupils' learning needs
 - making sure all staff adhere to the school's marking policy so that pupils always know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

2

In 2008, GCSE results were much better than the previous year when there was a dip, and were above average in several respects, for example, in the proportion of pupils with five higher grades. However, although significantly improved, the proportion of pupils having five higher grades including English and mathematics was no better than average, because GCSE results in these two subjects were average. The better results in 2008 made the school the eighth most improved school in the country. Pupils who followed vocational courses in school and with external providers achieved well. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities did well too because virtually all of them left with five graded GCSE results, often in the range A* to C. Pupils' current work in school indicates that pupils are making good progress and standards are rising further in all year groups. Checks on pupils' progress in the two previously average subjects, English and mathematics, show that standards have improved to above average by Years 9 and 11 in response to the emphasis that the school has put on them.

Pupils say they feel safe and are taught effectively about how to be safe both in school and the community. They are very well informed about internet safety. A small number of parents expressed concerns about bullying. Pupils agree that bullying occasionally takes place, but are confident that swift action is taken to tackle any untoward incidents. Some parents expressed concerns about poor behaviour; inspectors found pupils to be well behaved, polite and friendly in lessons. Pupils correctly consider they achieve well in lessons and assessments. They say they enjoy school and the opportunities to evaluate their own work, check the work of their peers and know exactly what they need to do to improve when marking is clear and consistent.

Pupils' contribution to the school and wider community is good and enriched well by the work of the school council and through activities as part of the sports college specialism. Examples include pupils' roles as junior sports leaders and the partnership which pupils instigated with the police to develop the 'Longfield Rave,' a dance club each Friday. This is having a marked impact on reducing anti-social behaviour in the local community. Pupils show great care and concern for people less fortunate than themselves by raising significant sums for charities chosen by the school council. They have a very good understanding about worldwide issues through the international school's programme which also promotes their very good cultural development. Subjects such as personal, social, citizenship and health education are developing pupils' personal development well, alongside the skills needed to become caring and responsible members of their school, town and global community.

Pupils are well prepared for the world of work, through, for example, extensive work experience placements, enterprise projects and practice interviews. A particularly impressive element is the action taken to develop the financial literacy of pupils across all age groups through innovations such as the 'Dragon's Apprentice'. Partnership with a local college provides those who wish it, the opportunity to follow and successfully complete applied learning course while remaining part of the school community. Such actions, including good careers advice, ensure a high proportion of pupils continue with their education or enter training or employment at the age of 16. Although pupils' attendance and punctuality are satisfactory, they are improving due to the considerable efforts made by staff and other agencies.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

The quality of the school's work

Because of good actions taken by senior and middle managers to increase the proportion of good or better teaching, pupils generally make good progress in their lessons. Where pupils learn well, high expectations of teachers, their excellent subject knowledge and pupils' good attitudes and behaviour are the norm. In such lessons

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

teaching is pacy; pupils are enthusiastic, well motivated and display high levels of concentration. Teaching challenges pupils and encourages them to formulate and discuss their own ideas with partners or in groups. This helps pupils to grow in confidence, secure in the knowledge of the good progress they are making. However, where teaching is predominantly satisfactory, learning slows because it is not always pitched precisely enough to the needs of all pupils. This means some more able pupils are not always challenged enough while others lose interest when taught concepts that are above their current level of understanding.

The improvement in pupils' progress is in part attributable to improvements made to the regularity and quality of assessment. The assessment system now ensures that targets set are based on high expectations of individual pupils and groups and their prior learning. Pupils' progress towards their targets is monitored assiduously by senior and middle managers and well targeted interventions take place if pupils need extra help. Improvements to the curriculum have also played a significant part. Tailored routes have been carefully designed to meet pupils' individual needs and interests and maximize motivation for their learning. The 'Opening Minds' programme which all Year 7 pupils follow, helps them settle well into school. It successfully promotes their personal development and well-being, stimulates an enthusiasm for learning and develops their confidence and skills such as enterprise that they will need as they grow up. A wide and varied programme of enrichment and out of school activities such as astronomy, extra support in basic skills, drama and cooking contributes valuably to pupils' achievement and enjoyment. Participation levels are very high. Pupils' competence with information and communication technology is very strong and successfully supports pupils' learning and achievement in many of the subjects that they study.

The school prides itself on the excellent support, care and guidance offered to pupils and rightly so. Pupils speak highly of the pupil-support team whose accessibility and care are valued. Support does not stop there; pupils know that form tutors, the CHIPS team and any adult in school will help them if they have a problem. The school has developed wide ranging partnerships with agencies such as health, education welfare, the police, and local authority children's services to quickly secure additional help and support for pupils as well as their families in times of acute crisis.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	2
Effective assessment	2
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	1
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Longfield is a harmonious school community where the ethos for learning is good and all show respect and tolerance for each other. The safety and well-being of pupils is paramount, and excellent safeguarding procedures are in place. All staff are carefully inducted into the school's robust child protection, risk assessment and health and safety arrangements and receive regular update-training. The school promotes

community cohesion well and pupils have good opportunities to engage with others of different cultures, socio-economic groups and faiths outside of school especially through the opportunities provided through the international school programme and actions taken through its sports college specialism. Because the school values all of its pupils equally it has taken concerted action to ensure all achieve equally well. The gap between the attainment of pupils at different Key Stages has narrowed markedly and standards in English and mathematics are rising to match those of other subjects. The school's excellent partnerships with a wide range of external organisations, including schools and colleges locally and overseas also supports pupils' learning and extends the curriculum extremely well.

Governance is good. Governors have good links with subject departments and are kept well informed about the school's work. They clearly understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and support and challenge its work well. Governors monitor finances robustly, make the best of the limited accommodation and assure that the school provides good value for money. Senior managers and governors continually seek out ways to build their relationship and communication with parents. They seek out parents' views in surveys and have developed a parental web-portal to improve communication further. Parents and pupils are appreciative of the regular reports, phone calls and complimentary postcards they receive.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	2
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	2
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	2
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	2
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire were positive about the quality of education and care their children receive. A number wrote additional positive comments about their children's enjoyment of school and the opportunities it affords them provided by the school. Some commented appreciatively on the communication flow between school and home, particularly valuing the way that important communications are sent out in the post. A minority however, felt that their suggestions and concerns are not taken into account. Nearly all parents say their children are safe and around ninety per cent feel well informed about the progress their children are making. A significant minority expressed concerns about the timing and value of academic mentoring days.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a Key Stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



13 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Longfield School, Darlington DL3 0HT

On behalf of the inspection team, thank you all for making us so welcome when we inspected your school recently, especially those of you who spoke to us at lunchtime and during lessons. We have considered your views and the views of parents who completed the inspection questionnaire carefully. Longfield is a good school and has some outstanding features, such as the curriculum, actions taken to safeguard you and the support, care and guidance you receive. You value greatly the pupil-support team and other adults who help you in times of need.

Longfield has improved well since the last inspection. Because of improvements in teaching, assessment of your work and the curriculum, you are now attaining above average standards and making good progress in your learning from the time you enter school in Year 7 to the time you leave in Year 11.

You told us you feel safe and enjoy school and we think you make a good contribution to the life of the school and your community. Although some parents believe that bullying is a problem, some of you who spoke to us said that it does occasionally occur but any incidents are quickly dealt with. Some parents also think that behaviour is an issue but we found your behaviour in lessons to be good. You have a great range of out-of school activities, particularly sporting activities, that you attend and enjoy and your information and communication technology skills are exceptionally good. Your attendance is satisfactory and improving.

To help the school to improve further we have asked it to reduce the in-school variation in the quality of teaching by:

- improving all teaching to the standard of the best in all departments
- ensure all teachers use the school's accurate assessment information when planning lessons so that work is always matched to pupils' learning needs
- making sure all staff adhere to the school's marking policy so that pupils always know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Thank you again and on behalf of the inspection team, please accept our very best wishes for the future.

Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector

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