

Longsands College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110905
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	337598
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Mark Phillips HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1772
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	372
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr A W Hyde
Headteacher	Mr Robert Whatmough
Date of previous school inspection	6 February 2007
School address	Longsands Road St. Neots Cambridgeshire
Telephone number	01480 353535
Fax number	01480 375757
Email address	enquiries@longsands.cambs.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 44 lessons, visited five tutor periods and attended three assemblies. Three of the lesson observations were conducted jointly with the Principal and another senior leader. Inspectors held discussions with senior and middle leaders, a selection of governors, and representatives from the St. Neots Locality Team. They also met with panels of students from Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4, and the sixth form. Inspectors looked at achievement data, the college's systems for monitoring the quality of teaching, teachers' lesson plans, and the specialist college plans. They also considered records on exclusions, attendance, racist incidents and bullying, as well as the college's strategies for promoting, monitoring and evaluating equality of opportunity and community cohesion. In addition to the survey of parents' views, to which 269 replies were received, a sample of students completed a written questionnaire and a staff survey was also conducted. The Principal helped HMI to plan aspects of the inspection and accepted HMI's invitation to observe the inspection team meetings, including the final meeting where judgements were discussed and made.

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

- how well students have achieved in their examinations since the last inspection, and how effectively current students learn in lessons
- how skilfully teachers use assessment to help all students make progress
- how effectively the sixth form provides for both the academic and personal development of students - and how well placed the leadership and management of the sixth form is to bring about further improvements
- the impact of the college's partnership work with other providers, external agencies, and parents.

Information about the school

Longsands College is a large secondary school with a large sixth form. It has been a specialist media arts college since September 2005, with English, media, and information and communication technology (ICT) as lead subjects. Longsands is one of two secondary schools in St. Neots; students attend from across the town, and from surrounding villages. Most students, but not all, are from White British backgrounds and speak English as their first language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, but the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is around a third of the national figure.

In October 2009, the local authority published a consultation document proposing the reorganisation of secondary education in St. Neots. The consultation period will end in late December 2009, with any change intended to be implemented from September 2010.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Longsands is a good college that successfully upholds its core values of 'care and consideration for others, creativity, independence and determination'. Several aspects of the college's work are outstanding. While there has been some variation in examination performance since the last inspection, the 2009 GCSE results were good and students currently in the college are making good progress.

These are some of the things that the college does well.

All students, including the most vulnerable, feel extremely safe in college.

Students have outstanding attendance and are very well-prepared for their future working lives.

The impact of the college's partnerships work is outstanding, contributing to the outstanding care, guidance and support offered to students.

Overall, students achieve well in their studies at Key Stage 4, as shown by above-average examination results and the good progress that they make in lessons.

Students in the sixth form make good progress overall, particularly in their personal development. AS-level results dipped in 2008 but standards are recovering, helped in no small part by students' good attitudes to learning.

Teaching is good. Students' positive attitudes and good behaviour allow teachers to use their good subject knowledge effectively.

The curriculum provides a good range of academic and vocational opportunities in Key Stages 4 and the sixth form.

The Principal provides strong leadership, supported by a consistently good senior team. The college has a good understanding of its performance. There are, however, some further steps to be taken before all aspects of its work could become outstanding. For example, there are a minority of lessons where more consideration should be given to students' learning needs, rather than on simply completing activities. In some cases, this means providing a greater variety of challenges to suit students who are working at different levels. Governance is good; there are sound management systems in place across the college, although there is room for greater sophistication in, for example, planning and monitoring aspects of community cohesion and equality of opportunity. Safeguarding arrangements are good; the college's staff verification and risk assessment systems are particularly thorough. However while registers are always taken in lessons, arrangements for monitoring sixth formers' general on-site attendance are not followed through as rigorously as they could be. There are other aspects of sixth form management that are underdeveloped, partly because of recent funding difficulties.

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Nevertheless, overall the college has good capacity to make further, sustained progress and provides good value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching, and the progress made by students, by
 - ensuring that all lessons are planned with an emphasis on the quality of students' learning, rather than just the activities to be completed
 - providing varied work in all lessons to challenge the more able and support less able students, rather than providing the same tasks for all.
- Strengthen the leadership of the sixth form by
 - enhancing the sixth form leadership and management structure to reflect the size of the provision and the importance of the sixth form within the college
 - ensuring that systems for registering students when they are on site are robust and monitored with the same rigour as attendance at lessons.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Standards are above average. The 2009 GCSE results were a significant improvement on those in 2008, with two out of every three students gaining five good passes including English and mathematics. This represented good progress for these students, given their starting points. However, results in the previous two years were not as positive, largely because of average standards in English and mathematics. In the lessons observed during the inspection, current students at the college were seen to be reaching above-average standards and making good progress in their learning. Inspectors were particularly impressed with the pride and care that many students take with the presentation of their work. Good progress is made by all groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is due in no small measure to the positive attitudes that many students bring to learning.

While there is a small minority who require exclusion for inappropriate behaviour, the majority of students behave very well and are keen to participate and succeed. Working relationships between students and adults are excellent. All of this helps students to feel exceptionally safe in college. They show positive attitudes towards many aspects of healthy living. However, a quarter of the students surveyed by inspectors expressed concern about the college's promotion of healthy lifestyles, specifically referring to the food choices available. Inspectors agree that this is an aspect to improve, both in the choices that they make in the college canteen and in the food that some bring into college, such as crisps and carbonated sugary drinks. Students develop very strong social and moral awareness and participate eagerly in activities that broaden their education. Nevertheless, more could be made of opportunities to develop their spiritual awareness, such as assemblies and tutor periods. Attendance throughout the college is outstanding. Students' application of basic skills is highly effective, and they develop exceptionally strong enterprise awareness and understanding of the world of work. They

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are very proud to belong to Longsands. However, while some make good contributions to college life through taking positions of responsibility, not all groups are equally represented in this way.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

There is good teaching throughout the college. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong across the curriculum. Good use is made of new technologies to present and explain ideas. Work is marked regularly. The best lessons have a strong emphasis on students' active participation and, as a result, students are enthusiastic about their learning. In a Year 9 music lesson, for example, students quickly understood and greatly enjoyed learning about the complexities of multi-layered rhythmic patterns through performing on djembe drums. Every student participated well and was able to improve, guided by authoritative but also encouraging teaching. While a significant number of lessons are of this quality, there are a smaller number of lessons where learning is only satisfactory because teachers' planning places more emphasis on the activities to be completed, rather than setting higher expectations for the quality of students' responses. In a

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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minority of cases, teachers set the same tasks for all members of the class, regardless of their differing needs and abilities. Ensuring that all lessons are planned with a clear focus on the quality of all students' work is central to reaching outstanding standards of teaching and learning. The curriculum is successful in meeting the needs of all students through a comprehensive choice of courses in Key Stage 4. The college is leading the way across St. Neots with the Creative and Media Diploma, although it recognises that not all of the original specialist college targets for participation have been met. There is good cross-curricular provision for core skills; provision for literacy and numeracy is stronger than that for ICT.

The success of the care, guidance and support starts with the excellent programme offered to students when they transfer from primary schools. There are very effective systems for monitoring the needs and development of all students. In such a large college, this success is due to strong pastoral leadership but also significant contributions made by staff at all levels, including tutors and teaching assistants.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The Principal provides wise, measured, and experienced leadership. Quite rightly, he is recognised by governors, staff and parents as central to the college's success. At the same time, the breadth and strength of experience in his senior team allows him to delegate roles confidently and effectively so that the college is not solely dependent on his leadership. This is a key reason why this large college runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and firmly supports the college's ambition for future improvements and developments. The college has made good progress since the last inspection and some outcomes, such as students' attendance and the extent to which they feel safe in college, have moved from good to outstanding. There is a well-established programme for monitoring the quality of lessons although there is a greater focus on the quality of the teachers' input, rather than on the quality of outcomes for students. Similarly, while self-evaluation is well-established at all levels of management and rightly celebrates the college's many good and outstanding features, some areas of relative weakness are not given the same consideration.

The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures is good. Partnerships with parents, and with other providers and external agencies, are outstanding. An excellent example of this is the work with the St. Neots Locality Team. Some of the most vulnerable students

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have been able to enjoy good personal and academic outcomes through this partnership. The college has also used its media specialist status to extend this work into the wider community, for example by producing an anti-bullying DVD on behalf of schools across the area. Overall, there is good promotion of community cohesion; some aspects are outstanding, but there is weaker planning and evaluation of cross-cultural issues. Similarly, while the college's promotion of equalities is good overall, planning and evaluation of race equality issues are not as strong as those for gender or disability issues.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The majority of students join the sixth form having achieved above-average standards in their GCSEs. However, an increasing number are transferring to Longsands from other schools and colleges, and they start with standards that are broadly average. The 2008 AS Level results, and subsequently the 2009 A Level results, were above average in some measures but with a significantly lower number of higher grades than should have been expected. The 2009 AS results were better, and the good teaching and learning seen during the inspection showed that current students are making good progress. Their excellent attitudes to learning and the very positive working relationships that they forge with their subject teachers play an important part in this. Other outcomes for students are good, and some are outstanding. Retention rates are high, as is the proportion of students who progress from Longsands to higher education or employment.

The sixth form curriculum is good. A full range of academic and vocational subjects is

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offered, catering well for all interests and abilities. However, some class sizes are too large. This results in tutors adopting a more direct teaching style which, while enabling them to convey their good subject knowledge effectively, results in less active learning for students. Care, guidance and support are also good; guidance is provided through regular individual tutor sessions, and there is good access to external agencies and services including careers and higher education advice.

Despite the good provision and the good outcomes achieved by students, and notwithstanding the good work done by subject teachers and personal tutors, inspectors judged that the leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. There have been recent changes to the sixth form leadership team; while there are management systems in place, the current structure is not strong enough to take this large and growing sixth form further. Procedures for monitoring sixth form students' general on-site attendance are not rigorously enough. There are issues with delayed funding for a number of newly-arrived sixth formers that have inhibited further development and have prevented additional management support being provided. This is a particular concern given the size and importance of the sixth form in relation to the college as a whole.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of parents who replied to the inspection survey were satisfied with the overall standard of education and care provided by the college. Extremely strong support was expressed for the college's leadership, and for the quality of teaching. The area where parents voiced most concern about was regarding the school's promotion of healthy lifestyles, with specific comments made about students' food choices. Inspectors agree that this is an area that could be improved. A number of parents also expressed concern about recent proposals to partner Longsands College with another local school. Inspectors cannot comment directly on these proposals or on these concerns. However, they did judge that Longsands has already built and sustained outstanding partnerships with other providers and agencies, and that these partnerships have had many benefits for the academic and personal development of students, particularly the most vulnerable.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Longsands College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 269 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1772 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	111	41	147	55	8	3	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	106	39	153	57	7	3	1	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	108	40	137	51	15	6	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	104	39	140	52	18	7	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	94	35	160	59	11	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	65	24	165	61	24	9	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	55	20	173	64	29	11	1	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	97	36	149	55	7	3	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	85	32	152	57	17	6	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	79	29	162	60	10	4	5	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	62	23	163	61	23	9	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	123	46	134	50	6	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	122	48	122	48	8	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



23 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Longsands College, St Neots PE19 1LQ

You will remember that we visited your college recently. This letter is for students in Years 7 to 11, to let you know the results of our inspection. The full report is being sent home to your parents and this report contains judgements about the sixth form, which we encourage students in Years 12 and 13 to read.

I would like to start by thanking and, indeed, congratulating you for the part that you play in making Longsands a good college. Your attendance is outstanding, a sure sign that you think Longsands is a good place to be. Behaviour is good overall, with many of you showing outstanding personal qualities. We were very pleased to hear that you feel very safe in college, and your parents share your confidence. In a number of respects, you show very good attitudes towards healthy living. However, we did note that a significant number of you still opt to eat crisps, have fizzy drinks, and other less healthy food at break and lunchtime.

Last summer, the Year 11 students did very well in their GCSE examinations. Since the last inspection, the college has helped students to reach above-average standards, and those of you in the school now are continuing to make good progress. You receive good teaching and you are able to choose from a good range of curriculum subjects. Mr Whatmough and his senior team give strong leadership to the college, supported by a good governing body. The way that they have built partnerships with your parents and outside agencies to support your education and care is outstanding.

We have asked the college to consider just one matter to improve the quality of your education in Years 7 to 11. That is to make sure that lessons provide all students with appropriate challenge and support by offering a greater variety of tasks for you to work at. This approach is most successful when you play your part too, by always setting yourself the highest expectations and goals. We saw some splendid student attitudes to learning when we observed your lessons and we are certain that you can rise to this challenge. We wish you well in your future studies.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector

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