

The Leigh Technology Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135297
Local Authority	N/A
Inspection number	343130
Inspection dates	14–15 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Wiola Hola HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1455
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	292
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bob Findlay
Headteacher	Frank Green (Chief executive)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Green Street Green Road Dartford Kent
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 32 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at some of the academy's documents including records of students' attainment and progress, a selection of policies and working papers, especially those relating to safeguarding, the academy development plan, and minutes of the Leigh Academies Trust. Inspectors analysed 218 parental questionnaires and also some questionnaires from staff and a sample of students.

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

- Students' recent and current attainment and progress, in the main school and in the sixth form, particularly in English and mathematics and for more able students
- The effectiveness of leadership and management in lifting the quality of teaching and learning, for example, in the work being undertaken to link English and humanities and through the specialist status
- The procedures for safeguarding students.

Information about the school

The academy opened in September 2007 when staff and students transferred to it from The Leigh City Technology College. It moved into its new building in January 2008. This non-selective academy is much larger than the average secondary school and exists in an area where there is selective education. The proportions of students eligible for free school meals, from minority ethnic groups and speaking English as an additional language are below average. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average but the percentage with a statement of special educational needs is well above average. There is a Hearing Impaired Unit with 20 students who are fully integrated into the mainstream curriculum.

The academy operates a 'small school' model with four colleges each with its own principal. It is part of the Leigh Academies Trust which also runs another more recently opened academy in the area, the Longfield Academy. The two academies operate in federation with each other under a chief executive officer.

As well as having a specialism in technology, the academy has additional specialisms in physical education and sport, and in business and enterprise. It is also the lead school for teacher training in the local area. The academy has Healthy School status and it is also designated as an International School.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding academy. It enables students to make good progress in their academic work and excellent progress in their personal development. The sixth form is a good one.

Outstanding leadership and management, including governance, embrace innovation and maintain a relentless focus on improving provision and outcomes for students. They underpin this academy's success. Students are rightly proud of what the academy helps them to achieve, and parents are very appreciative of the support and encouragement it gives their children. Students and parents speak highly of the staff and of the facilities in this vibrant learning environment that promotes so well students' self-motivation, positive attitudes to learning, and a tremendous sense of responsibility for their own lives and those of others. The academy's organisation in four colleges plays a fundamental and successful part in nurturing these attributes in students. Striking also is the highly effective work of support and administrative staff in enhancing students' work and well-being in many ways. In view of rising standards brought about through high quality leadership and educational provision, the academy demonstrates excellent capacity to improve further.

An outstanding curriculum and superb care, guidance and support for students are key features of the academy. These, coupled with good teaching, result in students' good overall achievement. There are, however, some inconsistencies in the quality of provision within and between subjects, in the main school and in the sixth form, usually related to the pace of teaching and learning. Senior leaders are fully aware of this. They and other leaders have taken, and are taking, action to improve students' achievement, and the rates of progress are clearly being speeded up. The academy's technology specialism is one of its major strengths. Students achieve highly in the areas of technology, reaching above average standards and gaining awards in national competitions. The other specialisms too add much to students' rich educational experiences and to their great enjoyment.

Standards are rising but they vary. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C is well above the national average. The proportion gaining these grades including English and mathematics, however, is below the national average. Results in examinations in the sixth form also vary. Throughout the academy, students' skills in literacy and numeracy are fostered well in many subjects but not consistently so, particularly for literacy, although some innovative approaches are being adopted to raise standards. Nevertheless, overall progress in these areas is good from students' starting points on entry to the school.

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

Students grow as courteous and considerate young people, aware of their skills and how to develop them both independently and in partnership. Their behaviour is excellent. Through a wealth of provision, including trips, visits, special studies and projects, national and international links, as well as through lessons day by day, the academy fosters extremely well students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In addition, highly effective partnerships with parents and carers, with a wide range of external agencies, and also with the recently federated partner academy, contribute greatly to students' good achievements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen further the quality of teaching and learning so that more of it is good or outstanding:
 - increase teachers' contribution to raising students' skills in literacy
 - ensure greater consistency in the pace of learning
- Refine further the range of courses available to sixth form students, and the academic guidance given to them, to match their needs and aspirations, and to ensure high quality support right across the academy.

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

Students settle quickly into the academy because high expectations of work and behaviour are conveyed so clearly by staff. Older students aid younger ones greatly, particularly in the mixed-age tutor groups, setting such a good example and conducting themselves maturely as they work diligently in the various work spaces available. Students' attitudes in lessons are positive even on those very few occasions when teaching is uninspiring. Students arrive ready and well-equipped to learn. They understand how well they are doing and want to succeed. Many make full use of the learning facilities outside of lesson times.

Students feel extremely safe. They state that bullying and racism are exceptionally rare and dealt with promptly if they ever occur. They say students 'look out for each other and treat everyone with respect'. They are aware of how to maintain personal safety including safe use of the internet. Students also have an excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lives; the academy's wealth of sporting activities and students' high participation in them supports this. Students cooperate well to initiate and organise many school activities including charity fundraising events. The various student councils are influential and students are very clear that their views are taken seriously. Students have very well developed skills in information and communication technology (ICT) and generally sound skills in literacy and numeracy. These skills, coupled with good punctuality and politeness, plus others such as cooperation, teamwork and using initiative that are developed so highly in many lessons, augur very well for students' future economic well-being. Virtually all students move on to education, employment or training. Nevertheless, for some students, relative weaknesses in literacy exist and the academy is rightly seeking to address these through various initiatives.

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

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Learning and progress are good overall. In both 2008 and 2009, a very large majority of students gained five or more GCSE grades A*-C, although under half gained such grades including English and mathematics. The proportion of GCSE grades A*/A increased from 2008 to 2009. In 2009, GCSE results went up in English language, mathematics, French and geography from the below average results of 2008. In design and technology, the above average GCSE results of 2008 were lifted further. They also went up in most other subjects. They fell in history and religious education where they were already below average in 2008. Students are successful on the applied courses in art and design, and in business. They do exceptionally well in science and ICT. Results in the sixth form vary from subject to subject but, in the main, students attain their target grades. In this highly inclusive academy, students with learning difficulties generally make similar progress to their peers. Those with statements of special educational needs achieve extremely well.

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	3
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	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Most lessons are planned well, with great clarity of purpose and varied activities that

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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engage students' interest. Teachers make very good use of the academy's comprehensive and well managed systems for assessment. In the main, team teaching in the large classes, as well as teaching elsewhere, is successful because staff are aware of and meet students' individual needs. The best teaching, especially in the practical and creative subjects, makes learning very relevant and encourages students to evaluate their own progress and take action to improve their work. The high quality ICT and technology facilities are used well by teachers to foster students' independent learning and to develop their range of social and practical skills. Most teaching is good, and some outstanding. In the few relatively weaker lessons, pace is slow, students are not required to be greatly active, or tasks are undemanding for some students. Some teachers are highly skilled in developing students' skills in literacy, others miss opportunities for doing so in their subjects. In seeking to improve outcomes in humanities and English, staff from these two areas teach in partnership in some classes. This strategy is showing signs of success.

The academy's curriculum is outstanding and the memorable events provided in lessons and at other times are highly valued by students. A wide range of learning pathways exists so that courses match students' needs and aspirations. Many vocational courses are offered. The academy has improved provision and outcomes for students who are more able. These students can take some examinations early

The academy's specialist status brings considerable benefits to students. Many activities across the curriculum have a business and technology focus. As an International School, the academy has strong links with projects around the world, helping to establish a school in India, for example. Exciting displays shows the richness of students' experiences and the high quality of their work, especially in art and technology. Dance and music in assemblies, for example, enhance greatly students' cultural development. Students respond extremely well to the academy's very unobtrusive but highly effective system of behaviour management built upon strong relationships, well established expectations, and efficient lines of communication between support staff, teachers, parents and senior managers. Student service managers, as well as teachers, provide excellent academic and pastoral guidance and have highly effective partnerships with parents and outside agencies. Guidance in the sixth form is good. Induction arrangements for new students are highly effective. Vulnerable students are provided with high quality care, guidance and support, tailored to their individual needs. The academy makes strenuous efforts to ensure that attendance is as high as possible.

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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

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How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership and management are exceptional. Senior staff maintain an uncompromising stance in pursuing excellence whilst caring for the well-being of all involved. Students know that they are highly valued and supported, and they understand exactly what is expected of them. This academy is not only working very effectively at improving the quality of provision and outcomes for its own students but working in strong partnership with other organisations to raise standards in the local and wider area. Governance, through the Leigh Academies Trust, is outstanding. Governors, with the chief executive officer, the four college principals and other senior staff act with total clarity of purpose and high levels of effectiveness to identify areas of strength and relative weaknesses, to articulate the means for improvement where this is necessary, and in taking decisive action. For example, facing shortages of mathematics teachers, a successful recruitment campaign resulted not only in filled vacancies but in the speeding up of students' progress in mathematics. Another example is in the creation of the highly inviting and stimulating accommodation, capable of being used flexibly, and cared for and enhanced to show proudly the students' work and achievements. Leaders have worked effectively to raise the overall quality of teaching and are continuing to do so through well targeted professional development and support.

Meticulous attention to detail is a feature of the exceptionally high levels of care for students, not only in meeting government requirements for safeguarding but in every aspect to ensure their physical and emotional well-being. The 'small school' model is highly effective in giving each student the attention he or she needs to make the most of the opportunities provided.

The academy promotes community cohesion extremely well, in many ways, at all levels and in many dimensions. It employs staff from around the world and uses their knowledge and experience, as well as curriculum content and enrichment activities, to enhance students' understanding across wide ranging issues, such as faith, social and moral dilemmas, and cultural and political activities. Vertical tutor groups in this academy create a strong sense of community cohesion. Exceptionally wide and productive links exist with businesses, other local schools, community groups and international organisations. Community cohesion is further enhanced through the work experience programme in India and China and through the work to establish schools in Uganda and Zambia.

Equality of opportunity is outstanding as is the academy's work on tackling discrimination. The high expectations that all students will achieve, experience success and make a strong contribution to the life of the academy are supported by excellent systems that track personal and academic progress. Close attention is given to ensure that individuals have access to those opportunities that best serve their needs and to promote positive attitudes in all respects.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
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	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Provision in the sixth form shares many of the strengths that feature in Years 7 to 11. Teaching is mostly good and encourages students to explore. In some lessons, teachers talk too much, thereby limiting opportunities for active learning. The best practice helps students to develop effective study skills, improves their self-confidence and uses assessments and examination marking criteria well to highlight where and how students can improve. Students appreciate teachers' support.

They are very positive about being part of the four internal colleges. They play a leading role in the mixed-age tutor groups and act as very effective role models for younger students, often guiding activities and arranging events.

Students' learning and progress are good overall, as are achievements given the low starting points of many students earlier in their school careers. Standards are generally below the national average but have improved steadily. Students do particularly well in the vocational and applied courses that are much enriched through links with businesses and through the specialist status.

The sixth form operates as an integral part of the academy and benefits from the same very effective leadership. Management is good. Students benefit from frequent reviews of progress, although there are some inconsistencies in the effectiveness of academic guidance across parts of the academy. Variability in examination results across subjects reflects some inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning.

The academy has relatively recently established sufficiently rigorous guidance to ensure students follow courses for which they are most suited. Senior staff have recognised the need to lift outcomes by improving academic guidance and the range of courses.

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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	2

Views of parents and carers

Most parents hold positive views of the academy's work, praising the good teaching and agreeing that the academy is led and managed effectively. All feel that their children are kept safe. The vast majority state that they are happy with their child's experience at the school and specific comments were made by the parents of some students with special educational needs and/or learning difficulties in praise of the support provided. A few parents expressed concern about the large teaching groups in some subjects.

Inspectors agree with parents that teaching is good. They found leadership and management to be outstanding. Outstanding also are the curriculum and the care, guidance and support provided to students. As far as large classes are concerned, the success or otherwise of the lessons in such cases depend more on the quality of teaching than on the class size. In most cases, teaching and learning in the large classes are good because the staff, teachers and teaching assistants, work well together to provide appropriate and interesting activities for the students and to check on their progress. In a few instances, learning was no better than satisfactory in the large classes.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Leigh Technology Academy 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 218 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1426 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	96	44	107	49	15	7	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	118	54	100	46	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	89	41	113	52	13	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	76	35	118	54	20	9	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	83	38	120	55	11	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	70	32	129	59	17	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	63	29	126	58	24	11	2	1
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)	76	35	116	53	15	7	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	82	38	107	49	20	9	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	87	40	109	50	11	5	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	50	23	135	62	15	7	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	92	42	109	50	11	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	116	53	89	41	13	6	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.



16 October 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Leigh Technology Academy, Dartford, DA1 1QE

Thank you for your welcome when inspectors visited the academy. I write on behalf of the inspection team to let you know our findings. We appreciate the conversations we had with some of you in lessons, break times, and in small groups.

The academy is outstanding because it supports you so extremely well in developing your personal qualities and in enabling you to make good progress academically. The sixth form is a good one. The organisation into four colleges, the vertical grouping system, good teaching, the excellent curriculum, and the outstanding care, guidance and support you receive all play a huge part in helping you to learn well. You develop as courteous and considerate young people with very positive attitudes to life and learning. You play a highly significant role in the academy community, through your excellent behaviour and participation in so many enriching activities that widen your horizons, and support you in understanding how to lead safe and healthy lives.

The academy's specialist areas of technology, physical education and sport, and business and enterprise are particularly successful in preparing you for the world of work. Virtually all students in Year 11 last year gained five or more GCSE grades A* to C which is well above average although the proportion gaining these grades including English and mathematics was below average. Standards are rising and the academy is speeding up the rates of your progress because all staff constantly seek ways to make learning better for you. It is clear that you enjoy greatly being at this academy. You and your parents value the work of staff and the facilities available in the wonderful accommodation with its rich displays and varied spaces for you to work in.

The academy is extremely well led and managed. Senior staff know exactly what is working very well and what needs to be improved. They agree with inspectors that the most important things that the academy should do to raise standards further are to:

- make even more lessons good or better: help all staff to develop further your literacy skills; ensure that you all learn with good pace
- develop further the range of courses for sixth form students and ensure that these students get consistently good guidance about what to study, how well they are doing and how to improve.

Work in these areas is well underway. We hope that you too play your part in raising standards by regular attendance and by continuing to work hard.

Yours sincerely,

Wiola Hola

Her Majesty's Inspector

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