

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

Rumballs Rd, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP3 8JB

Inspection dates:

11 and 12 March 2025

Outcome

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

The headteacher of this school is Graham Cunningham. The school is part of the Scholars' Education Trust (SET), which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the co-chief executive officers (CEOs), Claire Robins and Matthew Gauthier, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Geoffrey Payne.

What is it like to attend this school?

Longdean is a friendly and nurturing school. Pupils know that they have a trusted adult to turn to should the need arise. They say that this really matters to them and that it helps them to feel safe. The school has clear expectations for pupils' behaviour. Staff and pupils appreciate the revised behaviour policy. It increasingly enables lessons to take place without disruption.

Pupils study a range of subjects and courses that reflect their interests and career aspirations. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive effective support and access the full curriculum. Although the school's published outcomes in national examinations have started to improve, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should by the end of Year 11. Achievement in the sixth form is stronger. Sixth-form students are well prepared for their next stages in education, training, or employment.

The school recognises the importance of ensuring that pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, and pupils with SEND, gain wider opportunities beyond the curriculum. Pupils take part in a range of extra-curricular activities to develop their talents and interests, for example basketball, choir, photography, and cookery. Pupils relish these opportunities.

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

The school provides a broad and ambitious curriculum. Nevertheless, in 2024, some pupils did not achieve well enough in national tests, such as GCSEs. This is because many were affected adversely by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and previous weaknesses in the structure of the curriculum. In contrast, pupils currently at the school, including those with SEND, are typically learning well. This is because the school has raised the expectations of pupils' achievement. It has also made a series of well-considered changes to the curriculum structure and improved the quality of education it provides. Students in the sixth form are appreciative of the range of subjects on offer. They recognise that continuing in education improves their future options.

Teachers typically ensure that pupils revisit, practise and embed important ideas well. The teachers demonstrate this and support pupils effectively. This helps pupils to feel confident with the work they produce. In many lessons, teaching helps pupils to know and remember more. However, this is not consistently the case. In some lessons, staff do not design activities that support pupils' learning well enough. This means that, in some cases, pupils learn less effectively and do not produce work of a high enough standard.

Provision for pupils with SEND is very strong. Staff ensure that these pupils are well supported in class. The school's resourced provision provides high-quality support to pupils with speech, language, and communication needs. These pupils thrive and are well integrated into the school community.

The school is raising the importance of reading. Pupils who need to improve their reading skills are helped through effective small-group support. For example, sixth-form students read with younger pupils to help develop their confidence. Pupils in all years read regularly through daily 'Drop everything and read' times. However, the implementation of these sessions is not yet consistently benefitting all pupils.

The expectations for positive behaviour are communicated clearly to all members of the school community. Most pupils meet these expectations. Staff work effectively with those pupils who find it harder to meet these expectations. They check closely to ensure that disadvantaged pupils have the support they need. Parents and carers appreciate the care and support their children receive.

The school monitors attendance carefully and puts measures in place to remove barriers to attending well. With support from the trust, there has been a reduction in persistent absences. However, some pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and pupils with SEND, are absent too frequently and are, therefore, missing important learning.

The school has a well-designed personal, social, health and economic programme. It considers the possible risks in pupils' lives, including drugs, alcohol, sexual violence, and harassment. Pupils are taught an age-appropriate understanding of how to keep themselves physically and emotionally healthy and to recognise risks to their well-being. Pupils in all year groups learn about the world of work, including apprenticeships. Sixth-

form students value the individual support they receive when applying for higher education.

The school, with the support of the trust, has made many recent changes to further enhance the provision for pupils at the school. Staff are almost unanimously proud to work at the school and feel well supported regarding their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum is not consistently implemented to the same high standard across the school. Sometimes, expectations of pupils' work are not high enough. These small pockets of variation mean that some pupils are not learning to the same depth as others. The work given to pupils does not always give them opportunities to develop deeper thinking, such as reasoning and justifying. The school should ensure that good practice is shared and built on so that the quality of education is of a consistently high standard in all subjects and key stages.
- Pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with SEND, are not attending school as regularly as they should. The rates of absence remain persistently high for too many pupils. As a result, they are missing out on vital learning and wider development opportunities. The school and trust should maintain a sharp focus on reducing rates of absence. They must continue to implement and persist with effective strategies to secure sustained improvement in pupils' attendance.

Background

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

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

behaviour, or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in December 2015.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

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

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

School details

Unique reference number	137110
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10345316
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,436
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	242
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Geoffrey Payne
CEOs of the trust	Claire Robins (co-CEO) Matthew Gauthier (co-CEO)
Headteacher	Graham Cunningham
Website	www.longdean.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	26 and 27 November 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school joined the SET in December 2023.
- The school currently uses one registered and seven unregistered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. The lead inspector met with one of the CEOs and the chair of the board of trustees. She also met with members of the local governing body.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff, and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of information to evaluate the provision for pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of information about pupils' attendance. They observed the behaviour of pupils in classrooms, at social times and as they arrived at school.
- The views of staff who responded to Ofsted's survey were considered. Additionally, inspectors reviewed the views of parents through Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.

Inspection team

Sam Johnson, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Peter Petrou	Ofsted Inspector
Jennifer Brassington	Ofsted Inspector

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