

Inspection of Longsands Academy

Longsands Road, St Neots, Cambridgeshire PE19 1LQ

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 February 2024

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

The principal of this school is Catherine Cusick. This school is part of Astrea Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Rowena Hackwood, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ben Brown. There is also a regional director, Jo Myhill-Johnson, who is responsible for this school and four others.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have experienced a lot of change since the previous inspection. While much of this has been necessary, it has been unsettling for some pupils. Pupils' voice has not always been heard as well as it should, but this is improving. Pupils have increasing confidence that their opinions are heard. This supports them to feel happier.

The school has high aspirations for what pupils learn. Pupils value the knowledgeable teachers who support them to achieve well. However, in the past, this has not always been the case. Leaders' actions to address weaknesses in teaching have ensured that pupils now achieve well in many subjects.

Many pupils recognise improvements in behaviour that have occurred due to the school's actions. They feel safer and happier as a result. However, some do not. Some pupils still need further support to improve their behaviour to meet the school's expectations. Some pupils have concerns about the boisterous and disrespectful behaviour of some older pupils.

Pupils are accepting of difference. They learn about this through a tailored programme of personal development. Pupils benefit from extensive sporting opportunities that are open to all. Beyond sport, sixth-form students value organisations such as the medical society, and support available for university applications. This prepares them well for their next steps.

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

The trust has worked hard with school leaders to ensure that pupils learn well across an effective and broad curriculum, including in the sixth form. In many subjects, teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects, provide clear explanations and regularly check what pupils know. As a result, pupils achieve well in examinations and are well prepared for successful future study and/or employment.

In a few subjects, teaching has not been as consistently effective. This is because of temporary staffing arrangements or where teachers have needed to develop their practice further. Where this has been the case, leaders have acted to provide support and training. This has improved the quality of education provided and contributed to pupils achieving well overall. The school knows where improvement is still needed to ensure that teaching is consistently effective across the curriculum.

The school has ensured that the curriculum is ambitious. Many pupils successfully study English Baccalaureate subjects. There is also sufficient breadth in the curriculum to cater for pupils who wish to pursue different study pathways. As a result, pupils and sixth-form students usually complete their chosen programmes of study successfully.

The school has developed the effectiveness of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders identify pupils' needs clearly. They ensure staff have appropriate guidance to know how to adapt learning successfully. This enables pupils with SEND to achieve well. Above-average proportions of pupils with SEND continue their studies successfully in the sixth form.

Leaders have ensured a school-wide focus on developing pupils' reading ability. Pupils are increasingly confident with challenging texts as a result. Pupils who need it get extra support to help them catch up with their reading. This enables most pupils to access the school's curriculum successfully.

The school's focus on improving behaviour has resulted in improvements for many pupils. However, a core of pupils do not behave well enough. Some older pupils can be disrespectful or boisterous, which worries others. Previous systems focused on consequences, without the appropriate balance of reward and support to improve behaviour. The school has recognised this. Leaders are working hard to ensure that revised behaviour systems now have better balance. Some teachers do not implement the behaviour policy consistently. Pupils do not always show the same positive attitudes to learning, for example when agency staff teach lessons. When this occurs, pupils' learning is disrupted by the behaviour of others. Leaders recognise there is still more work to do to support some pupils to improve their behaviour. The school's actions are bearing fruit.

In the sixth form, behaviour and attitudes are consistently positive. Almost all students are more mature and take responsibility for their actions.

The school has ensured that the teaching of personal, social, emotional and health education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) have been given dedicated time across all key stages. Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of important issues. The school has ensured that there is a comprehensive programme of careers guidance. Sixth-form students benefit from links with further education providers and local businesses to make informed choices about their next steps. Opportunities for pupils' voice are becoming more meaningful, especially through the work of the school council.

There have been significant leadership changes in the trust and school. The school has made necessary changes, including in how behaviour is managed. These changes have had to address some deep-rooted behaviours throughout the school. A significant proportion of parents do not support the school's actions. The school and trust are working hard to rebuild positive relationships with parents. However, this remains a significant challenge.

Governors and trustees are challenging, empowering and supporting leaders effectively. This has resulted in improvements to the quality of education and pupils' personal development. The trust and school have worked to address staff's workload and well-being. Most staff are positive about the progress the school is making with this.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Changes that have been made have not been supported by some parents, pupils and staff. This leads to feelings of frustration towards the school. The school needs to continue to ensure that all stakeholders receive clear and effective communication, so that they are well informed about the reasons why decisions are made and actions are taken.
- The school has not ensured that some pupils understand the impact of their behaviour. These pupils do not respond positively to the school's behaviour management processes to improve their behaviour. Some teachers do not apply the school's behaviour policy consistently. As a result, some pupils do not behave well enough. The school should continue its work to ensure that pupils get the support they need to modify their behaviour and ensure that all teachers apply the behaviour policy consistently, so that pupils behave well.
- Some teachers do not consistently implement the curriculum as the school intends. As a result, in these subjects, pupils do not secure important knowledge as well as they do in most other subjects. The school should ensure that the curriculum is taught consistently well in all subjects.

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

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| Unique reference number | 136992 |
| Local authority | Cambridgeshire |
| Inspection number | 10288497 |
| 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 | 1,651 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 222 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Ben Brown |
| CEO of the trust | Rowena Hackwood |
| Principal | Catherine Cusick |
| Dates of previous inspection | 29 and 30 October 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The current principal took up post in April 2023. A new principal was appointed in 2020, shortly after the previous inspection. They left the school in the summer of 2022. An interim principal was in post prior to the appointment of the current principal.
- A new CEO of the trust was appointed in July 2020. Following this, there have been significant changes in the trust's secondary leadership team. The regional director for the Cambridge area, who works directly with the school, was appointed in June 2022.
- The board of trustees is accountable for governance. However, the school also has a local governance committee, which is responsible for some areas of the school's work.

- The school makes use of alternative provision. The school uses nine alternative providers. Five of these are unregistered providers and four are registered with Ofsted.
- 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

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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.
- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- To discuss governance, an inspector met with three trustees, including the chair of the board of trustees. An inspector also met separately with the chair and vice-chair of the local governing committee.
- An inspector met with the CEO, the assistant CEO and the trust director of secondary education to discuss the role of the trust.
- Inspectors met with the regional director, the principal, the special educational needs coordinator, the designated safeguarding lead, the head of sixth form, behaviour and personal development leads, school subject leaders and staff.
- Inspectors met with the local authority to gather its views on the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, physical education, languages and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spent time in the sixth form on both days of the inspection and held dedicated meetings with sixth-form students.
- Inspectors also considered the curriculum in some other subjects, including science, PSHE and RSE.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around school and at social times. Inspectors reviewed information and records of pupils' behaviour.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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 also held a dedicated meeting to explore attendance and the use of alternative provision.

- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted’s pupil survey and Ofsted’s staff survey. They considered the responses to the parent survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text messages.
- Inspectors met with a representative sample of parents and considered communications sent to the inspection team and lead inspector. Inspectors also held meetings with groups of staff and pupils to gather their views.

Inspection team

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|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| James Chester, lead inspector | His Majesty’s Inspector |
| Garry Trott | Ofsted Inspector |
| Aron Whiles | Ofsted Inspector |
| Cathy Barr | Ofsted Inspector |
| Polly Lankester | Ofsted Inspector |

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