



## QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

### REVIEW REPORT FOR LEIGH ACADEMY BEARSTED

<b>Name of School:</b>	Leigh Academy Bearsted
<b>Headteacher/Principal:</b>	Jane Tipple
<b>Hub:</b>	Leigh Hub
<b>School phase:</b>	Primary
<b>MAT (if applicable):</b>	Leigh Academies Trust

<b>Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:</b>	Leading
<b>Date of this Review:</b>	23/03/2026
<b>Overall Estimate at last QA Review</b>	Leading
<b>Date of last QA Review</b>	07/11/2022
<b>Grade at last Ofsted inspection:</b>	Outstanding
<b>Date of last Ofsted inspection:</b>	24/01/2023



## **1. Context and character of the school**

Leigh Academy Bearsted was established in 2020 as a new free school academy. The school has grown significantly from its initial 60 pupils to over 400 today. The academy is situated on the North Eastern outskirts of Maidstone within the local authority of Kent. The school has no immediate catchment area and serves pupils from a wide radius across the surrounding region.

The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) at the academy is just above the national average. The proportion of pupils for whom the academy receives pupil premium grant funding is below the national average. The proportion of pupils recognised as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with the national average. The academy experiences relatively high levels of pupil mobility.

The academy is part of the Leigh Academies Trust, established in 2008, which comprises 32 primary, secondary, and special academies, including one all-through academy and one grammar school.

### **2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well**

- The reflective and astute principal, supported by a cohesive, committed, forward thinking senior leadership team, drives the academy with a focus on securing strong achievement and holistic development for all pupils. Leaders draw on research and evidence-informed principles to shape provision and continually seek to develop teaching and learning. Leaders have consistently embedded a culture of high expectations across the academy. These are shared and enacted by staff at all levels.
- Leaders prioritise strong relationships with all stakeholders, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose. Communication with parents is regular and purposeful, including weekly updates and well-attended Nurture UK coffee mornings. These provide opportunities for families to engage directly with leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator (SENDCo) and pastoral team. Staff presence at the school gate in the morning further strengthens these relationships, enabling informal, authentic interactions with families. The role of the community relations officer enhances this work, supporting engagement and building trust.
- The academy has fostered connections with organisations such as Barclays. There are opportunities for parents to contribute to school life, including sharing their professional experiences. These partnerships enrich the curriculum and strengthen community links. Leaders have also developed meaningful relationships with local organisations, including a care home and a

preparatory school, further embedding the academy's role within the local community.

- Clear systems and procedures ensure that the school's vision is understood and enacted. Leaders are highly visible and accessible and expectations are consistently communicated, contributing to an orderly environment. For example, well-established routines at the start of the day support a smooth and organised experience for pupils and families.
- Leaders have developed a rigorous and evolving continuing professional development (CPD) strategy that supports all staff. Initially focused on establishing consistency, CPD has become increasingly personalised. The introduction of Steplab has further strengthened this strategy, providing a structured, research-informed framework for professional learning. Staff engage with a spiral curriculum of development, revisiting key principles and applying them in practice. Opportunities for collaboration enable staff to share strategies, such as approaches to writing and adaptive teaching.
- A strong culture of professional trust is evident, with staff willing to take risks and refine their practice. Coaching is developing, with staff engaging positively in this model. Early career teachers are well supported through mentoring, while ongoing training, including Trust-wide and in-school sessions, ensures that all staff develop their expertise. Monitoring processes enable leaders to evaluate the impact of CPD.
- Leadership opportunities extend beyond staff to pupils. Pupil leadership is well established through initiatives such as 'welcome buddies'. This is part of the pupil employment scheme, which provides meaningful roles within the school. Pupils also take on responsibilities such as 'language ambassadors', librarians and house captains. These roles allow pupils to support their peers, contributing to an inclusive environment.
- Leaders are actively involved in wider system leadership. The academy shares practice with other settings, including pedagogical approaches and curriculum developments. Leaders, including the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) leader and SENDCo, work collaboratively with external partners, strengthening provision both within and beyond the academy.

## **2.2 Leadership at all levels - Even better if...**

... leaders continued to refine CPD for support staff using a bespoke and personalised approach.

### **3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well**

- The academy is a calm, purposeful learning environment in which pupils engage earnestly and positively. Pupils transition smoothly. They settle quickly, demonstrating strong self-regulation and readiness to learn. Pupils feel confident to participate and take risks in their learning, understanding that mistakes are part of the process of improvement. Pupil agency is actively promoted, underpinned by a climate of respect, where differing viewpoints are valued. One pupil shared 'Everyone slots into place no matter what the differences are, everyone gets on.'
- Inquiry-based, transdisciplinary learning is a key strength of the curriculum and enables pupils to develop both breadth and depth of knowledge. The International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) supports pupils to make meaningful connections across subjects and apply their learning to real-life contexts. A year 4 pupil stated, 'Our school is special because we learn the IB PYP and this teaches you more than just the curriculum.'
- Pupils are given regular opportunities to discuss and reflect, contributing to a strong sense of curiosity. For example, one pupil has spoken about the value of sharing personal experiences related to conflict, enriching discussion and understanding. In a Year 6 Religious Education lesson, pupils explored beliefs through historical and contemporary contexts, including Christianity, slavery and modern figures, engaging in thoughtful dialogue. Similarly, in a Year 3 art lesson, pupils confidently shared their interpretations of artwork, including hieroglyphics and Monet, reflecting ambitious expectations.
- A sustained focus on writing has led to notable improvements in pupils' recorded outcomes. The school has developed a structured and increasingly personalised approach, ensuring that pupils secure foundational skills while also developing confidence and independence. Initiatives such as 'free writes' have enabled pupils to flourish, with many demonstrating increased fluency and enjoyment in writing. Books, including those of disadvantaged pupils, show clear progress over time. Approaches such as 'constructing sentences' based on 'colourful semantics' are embedded consistently, to support both whole-class teaching and targeted intervention. Foundational knowledge and skills are prioritised at the start of the academic year, ensuring that pupils are well prepared.
- Teachers use questioning skilfully to engage pupils and deepen understanding. In a Year 1 English lesson, questioning supported pupils to develop sentence construction, while in a Year 2 mathematics lesson, pupils articulated their understanding of fractions with increasing confidence. In a Year 4 science lesson, pupils drew on prior knowledge to make connections and reach evidence-based conclusions. Across lessons, teachers probe and

extend thinking, encouraging pupils to justify and refine their responses. In a Year 5 art lesson on printing, precise questioning and 'cold calling' required pupils to apply and extend their wider curriculum knowledge.

- The curriculum makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development. Through units of inquiry such as 'who we are', pupils develop a sense of identity and understanding of themselves as individuals and as part of a global community. The IB learner profile is well embedded and facilitates pupil reflection. In a Year 6 inquiry lesson, pupils engaged in a 'diamond nine' activity, debating concepts such as causation and perspective. Pupils listened carefully to one another and responded thoughtfully, demonstrating maturity in their discussions.
- Pupil progress meetings have been refined to strengthen reflective and collaborative dialogue, with a clear focus on improving provision. Staff engage in purposeful discussions to determine how best to meet the needs of different cohorts.
- In EYFS, adults provide well-judged support, addressing misconceptions swiftly and extending children's language through purposeful interaction. Children are consistently engaged across the provision and demonstrate independence and self-regulation. Phonics is taught with precision, enabling children to apply their knowledge confidently in early writing.

### **3.2 Quality of provision and outcomes - Even better if...**

... leaders and teachers continued to further strengthen varied questioning approaches to provoke even deeper thinking and confident responses to learning.

### **4.1 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - What went well**

- Inclusion at the academy is underpinned by a commitment to universal provision. The curriculum is both ambitious and flexible for all, enabling pupils to access learning alongside their peers. In a Year 4 geography lesson exploring Kenya and Japan, pupils used a range of resources to support inquiry and develop their understanding. Tasks were appropriately scaffolded, allowing all pupils to engage meaningfully. There was no discernible difference in access or participation for disadvantaged pupils or those with additional needs.
- Pastoral provision is highly responsive and contributes significantly to pupils' engagement and wellbeing. The pastoral team works closely with families, enabling early identification and support for vulnerable pupils. The introduction

of a pastoral support officer has strengthened this work, providing an additional layer of support for attendance, wellbeing and family engagement. This role has enabled more targeted intervention, including supporting pupils experiencing anxiety to establish positive routines. As a result, improvements in attendance and readiness to learn have been secured for individual pupils, including those at risk of persistent absence. Office staff also play a key role in supporting pupils, particularly those who join mid-year, ensuring that they are welcomed and supported to settle quickly.

- A strong emphasis is placed on understanding the underlying causes of behaviour. The 'rubber band' approach provides a flexible and reflective model, enabling staff to identify triggers and adapt provision accordingly. This has supported a shift in practice, with staff confident in responding to behaviour through an inclusive, informed lens.
- Leadership of special educational needs demonstrates a clear vision in which all staff recognise their responsibility for inclusion as part of universal provision. Ongoing professional development ensures that teachers are well-equipped to meet a wide range of needs. The use of one-to-one devices and assistive technology further supports pupils to access learning with independence.
- Early identification of need is prioritised, with staff working collaboratively to assess and respond to pupils' needs. Targeted interventions, including Lego therapy, social communication groups, 'SNIP' and 'toe by toe', are delivered by trained staff to provide precise support. Partnerships with external agencies, including 'STLS', enhance staff expertise through high-quality training in areas like precision teaching. These partnerships, alongside Trust support, strengthen capacity and ensure that provision is informed by current best practice.
- As a result of well-considered provision, all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are supported to access the full curriculum, develop confidence and make strong progress from their starting points.

#### **4.2 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - Even better if...**

... N/A

## **5. Area of Excellence**

Early Years Foundation Stage

### **Accredited**

#### **5.1 Why has this area been identified as a strength? What actions has the school taken to establish expertise in this area?**

Leadership at all levels for EYFS maintains a strong focus on pedagogy and high expectations, while the child-centred IB PYP framework ensures a curriculum that extends to all children. The approach prioritises a child-centred EYFS curriculum rooted in real-life experiences and a sense of 'awe and wonder'.

Children's accelerated rates of development are underpinned by a rigorous focus on foundational skills. Adults proactively identify and address gaps, 'closing the loop' to ensure errors do not persist. This proactive pedagogy ensures that all, including vulnerable learners, make progress. Provision is adapted for individual children. Adults foster deep, individual relationships with pupils and are able to identify accurately each child's strengths and the next steps in their learning.

EYFS provision takes a 'stage not age' model. There is a focus on the incremental steps of learning, ensuring that the curriculum remains inclusive and accessible to every child, regardless of their starting point. The IB Primary Years Programme serves as the structural framework for this.

There is a focus on continuous staff improvement through collaborative reflection and sharing best practice within the team, as well as within the wider Trust.

Collaboration is central to the ethos of the setting. Leaders have worked with other schools to share practice and assist in the establishment of new Nursery provision, including those in different local authorities. The EYFS team also supports school improvement related to child development within their own academy, for example by working with the English leader to align letter formation strategies from EYFS to Year 6. Academy staff are now better equipped to identify and address functional handwriting gaps. This cross-phase synergy ensures that the foundational expertise

within the EYFS informs and strengthens teaching standards throughout the entire academy.

### **5.2 What evidence is there of the impact on pupils' outcomes?**

Outcomes at the end of EYFS are consistently well above national averages. Children are happy, independent, and motivated learners.

### **5.3 What is the name, job title and email address of the staff lead in this area?**

Jess Downes, EYFS leader, [jessica.downes@bearsted.latrust.org.uk](mailto:jessica.downes@bearsted.latrust.org.uk).

### **Following the QA Review**

The review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. However, we encourage you to share the main findings with your hub/hub manager so that they can support your hub's activity planning. Challenge Partners will also collate and analyse report content to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector each year.

For further support following your QA Review, schools can access the School Support Directory; the Challenge Partners online tool that enables schools to connect with other schools in your hub and across the national network of schools.

Schools can also attend Sharing Leading Practice (SLP) events where schools showcase excellent and/or innovative practice. Sharing Leading Practice events allow school leaders with specific improvement needs to visit a school or attend an online webinar hosted by a school, with outstanding provision in that area.



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Both the School Support Directory and the Shared Leading Practice events can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website. (<https://www.challengepartners.org/>)

Finally, following the QA Review, schools may find it useful to refer to research such as the EEF toolkit to help inform their approach to tackling the EBIs identified in the report (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>)