



## QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

### REVIEW REPORT FOR LEIGH ACADEMY WILMINGTON

<b>Name of School:</b>	Leigh Academy Wilmington
<b>Principal:</b>	Michael Gore
<b>Hub:</b>	Leigh Hub
<b>School phase:</b>	11-18
<b>MAT:</b>	Leigh Academies Trust

<b>Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:</b>	Leading
<b>Date of this Review:</b>	11/03/2026
<b>Overall Estimate at last QA Review:</b>	Not applicable
<b>Date of last QA Review:</b>	Not applicable
<b>Grade at last Ofsted inspection:</b>	Outstanding
<b>Date of last Ofsted inspection:</b>	04/05/2023



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

Leigh Academy Wilmington is located in Kent and is the only non-selective school in the local area. There are four grammar schools nearby and higher prior attaining students from the area attend them, therefore the majority of students at the academy are middle or low prior attainers. There are 1390 students at the academy, and it is oversubscribed.

The proportion of students with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is in line with the national average, although there is a higher-than-average percentage of students with education health care plans (EHCPs).

There is a lower-than-average proportion of students with English as an additional language (EAL). The percentage of students who are disadvantaged is below the national average, although over a third live in neighbourhoods among the 50% most deprived in England. Students also have a lower reading age than the national average when they join the academy.

The academy's stated purpose is 'education for a better world with no child left behind' and the values are exemplified in the fourth college motto 'strive further, reach higher'.

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

- Leaders are relentless in seeking the very best for students and this is exemplified in the commitment that 'getting better never stops'. Leaders are highly visible and the experienced principal has clear vision and ensures high aspirations.
- The academy plays a leading role within and beyond the trust. This includes sharing their leading provision in both the International Baccalaureate (IB) and Middle Years Programme (MYP). The academy has won international awards and built excellent links with schools in India, China and Spain. In June, the academy will host the IB MYP National Conference and the academy's extended writing approach has been shared with all trust schools.
- There are rigorous lines of accountability and action tracker grids record specific actions. Line management has a focus on communication from senior leaders to ensure a consistent approach. Leaders monitor the quality of curriculum, and data drops are used forensically to assess and maximise students' progress.

- Middle leaders make a very positive impact and appreciate the autonomy they have within the curriculum for creativity and the choice of pedagogy. They thrive with the staff spotlight structure in place and access to resources such as the teaching and learning toolbox. The introduction of the group line management meetings for the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects is celebrated as a way to combine accountability with professional development.
- There are well developed pathways to career progression and extensive training within and beyond the trust. Middle leaders are enthusiastic about the wide range of opportunities to get fully involved in academy wide initiatives and projects, including a virtual exchange with a school in India.
- Teaching and learning is well led and The Wilmington Way sets out a clear and well researched approach. Staff engage in instructional coaching using Steplab and there is now a weekly teacher input to showcase helpful teaching and learning strategies. This has developed a leading learning culture. The teaching and learning framework and commentary sets out clear criteria for learning observations and also monitors key strengths and any areas to further develop.
- Pastoral leadership and systems are strategic. The small school approach comprises Apollo, Minerva and Jupiter, with Olympus as the sixth form school. The vision and values are the same and each has its own leadership, form tutors, staff and student services support team. Students praise the pastoral care teams in each college and say that the support systems in each college and across the academy are the clearest reason why 'even the hardest days don't feel too bad'.
- Personal development is excellent. The passport to success documents are linked to the IB qualities and are embedded throughout the academy. There are three action days, three culture days and three interdisciplinary days each year, where personal development and RSHE are firmly embedded in the curriculum for students. British values run through the personal development curriculum and are firmly embedded, particularly through the IB attributes.

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

- ... leaders continued to systematically develop student voice to both capture positives and inform strategic actions to ensure the very best possible education and outcomes for all students.

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

- The curriculum is ambitious and rooted in the IB principles with a global perspective. The number of students entering the English Baccalaureate subjects (EBacc) has quadrupled in the past three years and their progress is consistently above the national average.
- Each subject curriculum includes factual, conceptual and debatable questions which enable students to consider concepts and discuss their ideas. There is extended writing in each subject and this allows students to explain more fully using key subject vocabulary.
- Behaviour for learning is excellent and there is a wide range of rewards including the LAW league of excellence, LAW legends, Hero rewards, reward trips and postcards given for excellent effort and achievement. Students are very considerate and positive in lessons and around the school.
- The Record of Progress folders document students' assessed work and have been developed to promote students' understanding of their progress. Students produce high quality work and a lesson is given for them to reflect on the feedback from their teachers and articulate how to improve. Year 7 students were very positive about the reflection sheets and were keen to explain how these were used, saying 'this really helps us to improve our work'.
- Students are immensely proud of their teachers 'who always go above and beyond to explain learning tasks'. There is a high level of academic challenge. For example, students in a Year 11 enterprise lesson were learning in depth about income and cost and were highly engaged in the learning. They took an active part in whole class feedback.
- Teachers use assessment for learning consistently well. In a Year 10 Spanish lesson, the teacher used questioning to ensure all students critically analysed a student reading a Spanish extract aloud. Students were therefore able to highlight successful pronunciation and provide targeted feedback on specific areas of performance.
- Students understand success criteria and use assessment well. In a Year 7 design technology (DT) lesson, students were clear on the end goal and were evaluating the mechanics and safety of toys, with their evaluation informing their own future design. The teacher explained very well, giving clear instructions. Students with SEND were positioned at the front of the class so that the teacher could check in and guide them.
- Student voice is used well and the Head Boy and Head Girl meet with the principal each module. Students have led positive improvements to road

safety and the rewards system, including badges and 'reach for the stars' with Year 11 students. Student surveys from the trust also include questions on the quality of education.

- Students thrive in the sixth form. In a Year 13 history lesson, students worked in trios to construct a response to an exam question. The teacher had clearly established routines, which helped to activate student agency as well as promote discussion and peer collaboration.
- There is highly successful post-16 provision. Outcomes are positive and on a continuous upward trajectory. Leaders know and understand their student community and have constructed an offer which ensures a large percentage of year 11 remain at the academy for their Key Stage 5 studies. The wide range of courses include IB courses, BTecs and a growing number of T levels. Positive outcomes have secured students their preferred destinations with the largest number of students moving onto university last year, many of these being in the Russell Group. The business engagement management officer ensures a broad range of apprenticeship opportunities are available for students, as well as visiting speakers and trip opportunities.

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

... all teachers followed the Wilmington Way so that the excellent teaching in the majority of lessons is fully replicated across the academy.

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

- All students achieve well from low starting points. Outcomes for disadvantaged students are consistently above the national average and outcomes for students with SEND are positive, with all students making excellent progress.
- Disadvantaged students are allocated a small school college most appropriate for their needs as well as a post-16 mentor. Mentors receive training and offer support for students in literacy and reading, supporting confidence and self-esteem, nurturing a positive attitude for learning and developing social skills.
- Leaders identify and overcome six barriers for disadvantaged students. Low literacy and academic starting points are addressed with a highly positive extended writing approach as well as Accelerated Reader and word of the week. Chromebooks are given to overcome digital poverty and allow

disadvantaged students to access homework activities. The business engagement leader builds links with businesses and the wider community to overcome the barrier of low aspirations and limited cultural capital. The barrier of mental health and low self-esteem is addressed by the dedicated wellbeing manager. The academy has achieved the National Wellbeing Award, with students able to access trained mental health professionals.

- The academy has several unique and innovative approaches to motivating and rewarding disadvantaged students. This includes 'Wilmington on Wheels', a partnership with Halfords to allocate road worthy bikes to students to help them travel to and from school. The 'Year 11 hotline' enables Year 11 students to make contact if there are any challenges on exam days and resulted in full attendance for exams in the summer. Appointments are opened for disadvantaged students two weeks in advance and this has led to improved attendance at parents' evenings meetings.
- Staff in the specialist resource provision (SRP) and within each college access a range of training to meet the needs of learners with additional needs. The academy has an award for being ADHD friendly and has universal strategies such as 'busy bags'. The SRP has a range of clubs on offer which support students who may find unstructured time difficult to navigate.
- Students say that 'my favourite thing about the school is the SEND department'. One Year 10 student said that 'the SEND staff helped me cope with a lot of things on my own, The teachers are so nice. The way they work with children is so good and they have helped me become more independent'.

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

- ... the highly successful approaches in the specialist resource provision were replicated, where appropriate, across the academy.

## 5. Area of Excellence

Extended writing

### Accredited

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

The academy extended writing approach has a clear rationale and evidence base. Leaders have linked this approach with the academy's excellent literacy provision and the leader has developed a positive whole school approach with a clear rationale and intent. Plans are detailed and staff are invested in the approach, understanding the vital importance of extended writing for their students.

In 2018 the leader completed a master's degree in leadership in Education, in which the dissertation focus was the vocabulary gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students. This has given her research-based expertise which she has developed in her roles at the academy.

The academy has taken a whole school approach for this strategy. The extended writing project was discussed in a Raising Standards meeting with all middle leaders in order to discuss any misconceptions and provide a platform for feedback. Later, the project was divided into a two-phase roll-out to ensure each step was integrated effectively before the next step was introduced.

Although six steps were outlined, subject areas have had autonomy over how to best implement the strategies in their subject area to ensure success. For example, every unit plan was adapted and developed to incorporate extended writing. By adapting unit plans, extended writing has now become the main focus in lessons across all subject areas. Drafting and re-drafting are explicitly taught. Every unit plan identifies four key words per unit, which are explicitly taught to students. These words are then assessed at the end of the unit plan. This indicates that the extended writing approach is embedded across all subjects and is a clear area of excellence.

Senior leaders, along with other middle leaders, recorded a CPD session that was completed on an inset day by all trust teaching staff members in February 2025.

The senior leader has worked alongside other trust schools to support the implementation of a writing strategy and has been asked by the IB to facilitate a workshop on how to implement a successful Programme Development Plan (PDP). She has been asked to be part of a pilot scheme for the Department for Education, to support schools reading, writing, and literacy skills.

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

Students' outcomes have improved in all year groups and data shows significant improvement in the vast majority of student outcomes across all subjects, including for disadvantaged students and students with SEND.

The extended writing strategy has been successfully implemented and sustained over time. This strategy has improved the quality and quantity of students' writing by enhancing writing resilience. Academic vocabulary has been explicitly taught across disciplines to enhance students' word hoard, understanding and quality of sentence structures.

There is clear quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate impact. A recent review of books and assessments in lessons, learning walks and evaluation of ROP folders has demonstrated that extended writing is embedded firmly across all subjects.

Students are very positive about this approach and student surveys indicate that they are positive about extended writing and understand and appreciate the positive impact.

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

Ciara Cardiff  
Assistant Principal (Lead on English)  
ciara.cardiff@wilmington.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 content reports from across the partnership of schools and trusts including using AI tools to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector (sharing these with the partnership) each year. The QA Review reports remain confidential to Challenge Partners and the host school. This ensures that schools embrace the review as a development process, acting as a catalyst for their ongoing improvement. This is the primary purpose of the QA review. However, our aim is that the thematic analysis will demonstrate the additional value of a sector wide overview, illustrated with real-life examples.

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 partnership of schools. The School Support Directory 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>)