

Name of School:	Leigh Academy Tonbridge
Headteacher/Principal:	Michael Crow
Hub:	Leigh Hub
School phase:	Secondary with sixth form
MAT (if applicable):	Leigh Academies Trust

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Leading
Date of this Review:	19/01/2026
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	N/A
Date of last QA Review:	N/A
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	06/12/2022

Quality Assurance Review

The review team, comprising host school leaders and visiting reviewers, agrees that evidence indicates these areas are evaluated as follows:

Leadership at all levels

Quality of provision and outcomes Leading

AND

Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and/or pupils with additional needs

Area of excellence Accredited

Previously accredited valid areas of excellence N/A

Overall peer evaluation estimate

Important information

- The QA Review provides a peer evaluation of a school's practice in curriculum, teaching and learning, and leadership. It is a voluntary and developmental process, and the peer review team can evaluate and offer 'peer evaluation estimates' based only on what the school chooses to share with them.
- The QA Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades. The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is developmental not judgmental.
- The QA Review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. If you choose to share this report, or extracts thereof, externally (e.g. on your website or with parents), please ensure that it is accompanied with the following text:

Challenge Partners is a charity working to advance education for the public benefit. We are not a statutory accountability body. The QA Review does not audit schools' safeguarding or behaviour policies and practices. However, Lead Reviewers and visiting reviewers are expected to follow Challenge Partners' safeguarding policy and report any concerns as set out in the procedures.

1. Context and character of the school

Leigh Academy Tonbridge is a rapidly growing secondary academy with a sixth form. In 2022 there were approximately 400 students on roll. Today, there are around 820 students and this number is growing significantly each year. The academy has transitioned from a boys' school (formerly Hayesbrook Academy) to a co-educational setting. As part of this transition, 55 girls joined the academy in Year 7 in September 2025.

The academy has a comprehensive intake. It is situated in West Kent, an area offering close proximity to several selective schools in Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. The academy is in receipt of pupil premium grant for one third of its students. This is above the national average.

The academy's core values are integrity, courage and imagination. Its mission is '*to teach those that we have the privilege to care for, to do the right thing, to make courageous choices and to ignite their curiosity and imagination.*'

The academy has been part of Leigh Academies Trust for four years. The Trust was formed in 2008 and has 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, astute principal, supported by his united leadership team, has overseen a significant transformation at the academy. Together they continue to drive ongoing improvement in a highly strategic, considered manner. Leaders are highly visible. They communicate their vision clearly to all stakeholders, helping to forge a strong, shared identity across the academy's community. Leadership is intentional and rooted in an attuned understanding of context.
- Inclusion is central to the academy. Leaders have cultivated an ethos of belonging, where the needs of both students and staff are carefully considered. Staff are empowered, trusted, and given agency. As a result, they feel valued and describe a culture of mutual respect, shared purpose, and meaningful support.
- Leaders prioritise continuing professional development (CPD) with a structured learning curriculum that supports progression for all staff. 'StepLab' has accelerated the impact of coaching and enabled colleagues, including leaders, to continue to grow. The 'research group' comprises volunteer teachers from across departments and has evolved into a forensic CPD forum. This group generates practical teaching strategies, such as 'silent starters', which have been implemented academy-wide and assist the continual refinement of pedagogical approaches. Leaders facilitate CPD sessions to include the explicit modelling of these and other teaching

techniques. Deconstructing these approaches allows staff the time to reflect on how they can then best apply them. The academy's open-door practice, 'shout-outs', and peer visits facilitate collaboration. CPD is underpinned by research. Staff report that this consistently helps to enhance their confidence and clarity.

- Leaders at all levels, including those responsible for governance and Trust leadership, demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the academy. Quality assurance cycles are well-integrated and thematically aligned. Directors of learning lead activities, supported by senior leader line managers. Outcomes are reflected upon and used to shape both departmental and whole-school CPD. Middle leaders engage in candid dialogue with each other, with senior leaders and colleagues within the Trust to share practice, a process that staff describe as 'powerful and impactful'.
- Leaders have led significant curriculum development. The International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) is embedded across Key Stage 3. The MYP teaches transferable skills such as enquiry, reflection and independence, which the academy's curriculum ensures are sustained into Key Stage 4. Leaders report enriched learner development, including rising reading ages and increasing pupil independence. The academy's Key Stage 4 offer has broadened, supported by specialist teaching recruitment and forward-thinking curriculum design. At Key Stage 5, the offer includes a range of IB Diploma subjects, vocational subjects and the IBCP core, combining academic rigour with wider personal development. The broad, inclusive curriculum prepares pupils for success in school and beyond.
- Leaders continually develop and refine their 'teaching and learning framework' over time to support staff in understanding the purpose and impact of key pedagogical approaches. Departments have created subject-specific guidance aligned to the framework, which is revisited each academic year, to support disciplinary implementation.

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

... strong leadership at all levels was sustained to keep curriculum and teaching approaches sharply aligned to the new Key Stage 5 qualification demands and the independent skills that students require.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The academy is a calm, consistent, purposeful learning environment. Students are very keen to engage. Teachers establish clear expectations through consistent routines. In a Year 8 geography lesson on deforestation, students knew clearly what was expected. They swiftly began their reflections. In a Year 11 English lesson on poetry, the '3,2,1' routine, used consistently

across the academy, secured students' full attention and allowed them to focus on their learning,

- Personal development is of high importance. Enrichment is timetabled to ensure all students have access to a wide range of opportunities including sport, performing arts, politics and crafts. A broad range of trips and visits further enriches provision. Safeguarding data is analysed to identify trends and shape the personal, social, health and education (PSHE) curriculum. This responsive approach ensures coverage of relevant, timely topics. Assessment is mapped across PSHE to support progression, allowing staff to understand the impact. Careers guidance is well developed, with engagement and awareness reviewed, including through the use of student voice and 'Compass Plus'.
- Teachers across departments skilfully use a range of questioning techniques to activate prior knowledge and support new learning. In a Year 7 drama lesson on stage positioning, targeted questions prompted high levels of recall, enabling students to connect previous ideas to current content. During a Year 13 geography lesson on colonialism, students were given thinking time to retrieve and apply key definitions before engaging with new material. A Year 11 Spanish lesson began with an introduction to the topic of celebratory culture. The teacher's skilful questioning and sharing of supportive resources enabled students to reflect on what they already knew. This further enabled them to identify gaps in their understanding and to build their confidence.
- Teachers across the school use assessment for learning strategies to swiftly identify and address misconceptions. In a Year 10 mathematics lesson on gradient, students used whiteboards, enabling the teacher to adapt instruction. In a Year 12 business lesson on cashflow and profit, misconceptions were quickly identified and then clarified. In a Year 10 history lesson on medical advancements, peer-marked assessment questions were followed by 'cold calling' questions requiring students to articulate their understanding.
- Students' books across various subjects show significant evidence of teachers utilising live marking and students engaging in self-assessment. These practices provide students with valuable opportunities to reflect on their learning. 'Feed forward' feedback from teachers informs students of their future learning.
- Teachers provide clear and purposeful modelling to support student understanding and access to learning. In a Year 10 art lesson, the teacher's modelling enabled students to engage in independent, reflective work. During a Year 9 woodwork lesson including measurement, modelling broke down the task into small, sequential steps, supporting student's accuracy.
- Students speak about their pride in being part of the academy. A group of Year 12 students described that all the teachers knew them well and provided high levels of support and care. One of these students who had been at the academy since the start of Year 7 said, 'Your voice is heard and you can share your concerns, the school listens and makes adjustments.'

- The school has a well-established literacy strategy. During form time, activities focus on vocabulary development, supporting recall of key terminology. In a Year 8 science lesson on pollinators, oracy was prioritised, with students rewarded for verbal contributions. Leaders emphasise that the focus on students' literacy acquisition is a shared responsibility and embedded in classroom practice. Sparx Reader is used as a reading baseline assessment. Students with lower reading scores then complete a further digital assessment to identify specific barriers. This allows for a shared understanding of reading needs and targeted support.

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

- ... teachers continued to refine the consistency of high participation strategies to ensure that students' thinking and understanding are deepened even further.

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

- Adaptive teaching is a strength of inclusion within the academy. Teachers engage in regular, open dialogue with the special educational needs coordinator (SENDCo) to help them adapt learning. Curriculum leaders collaborate with the inclusion team to ensure curriculum access is adapted appropriately. This includes supporting foundational gaps in subject-specific knowledge. Inclusive teaching is the first priority in the academy's inclusion strategy and StepLab supports the sharing of inclusive practice. In staff briefings, bite-sized, theme-based reminders are shared to help teachers ensure classrooms are accessible to all. Lead practitioners contribute to the focus on developing research-informed inclusive pedagogies.
- The school's digital strategy, including universal Chromebook access, has been 'transformational'. Every student has a device, empowering them to revisit prior learning, work independently, and access personalised tools. For vulnerable students, Chromebooks can be used as a means of targeted support. For example, the use of 'Google Read & Write' has removed barriers to learning for many and supported increased student autonomy.
- 'Inclusion champions' from across the departments work alongside the SENDCo to trial new strategies and share best practice. Their feedback is valued and supports a culture of openness and trust. Support staff are used strategically to make an impact on learning. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson on poetry, the teaching assistant moved purposefully around the class, using visual prompts and mini whiteboards. This helped to keep a number of vulnerable students engaged.

- Interventions are carefully planned and aligned to need. Each is chosen based on impact and how that support complements classroom practice and holistic development. For example, the intervention 'Speed Up', a touch-typing programme, has improved confidence and fluency for students with fine motor needs. Sessions are quality assured and reviewed including using assessment data.
- The SENDCo and inclusion team work closely with all students, including those who are disadvantaged, to ensure they feel supported from the outset. Each student meets with a senior leader where expectations and support are clearly outlined. The school collaborates with local schools and manages in-year admissions through a rigorous process. College teams provide ongoing high levels of pastoral care.
- Attendance is tracked rigorously, including through the use of the Trust-wide tracker, which enables leaders to identify patterns, intervene early, and monitor the impact of actions. The attendance officer works closely with college teams to provide timely data, allowing pastoral leaders to act quickly, often using trusted relationships to support re-engagement. Whole-school CPD has strengthened staff understanding of emotionally based school avoidance, supporting earlier identification. Year 6 data and partnerships with primary schools help predict and address emerging needs. Rewards systems promote positive attendance habits. The school has narrowed the attendance gap for disadvantaged students.

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

... N/A

5. Area of Excellence

Equity through Ambition – delivering an exceptional, aspirational education for all.

Accredited

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

Led by the principal, leaders at all levels have ensured they have a thorough, deep understanding of the community that they serve. This strong contextual knowledge has enabled them to forge a vision and mission which is attuned to the needs of their students and families, underpinning all strategic choices. Leaders are highly measured and intentional with the provision that has been established. They reflect

on how key aspects of the academy are interconnected and the positive impact each element makes holistically. Fundamental elements of the academy's approaches are centred around the curriculum, inclusive teaching and learning, and high levels of pastoral care.

The academy's curriculum is designed to be broad and ambitious. It offers the IB MYP and IBCP learning skills woven throughout, with a dedicated focus on literacy and digital education. There is a strong promotion of personal development including an extensive enrichment and cultural capital offering, with careers guidance firmly embedded across the programme.

Inclusive teaching and learning have been a central strategic priority. The academy's literacy and inclusion strategies, combined with the ongoing focus on professional development, have fostered a culture where meeting students' needs is foremost.

The academy places an imperative on knowing all students as individuals. The 'small school' model has helped to facilitate robust pastoral systems that enable staff and leaders to have knowledge of their students. This approach has made a significant impact on developing behaviour and culture within the academy.

Members of the leadership team regularly support peers in other schools. For example, a nearby academy has undergone rapid development in recent years, supported by the implementation of several elements from Leigh Academy Tonbridge's approach. The academy has worked with the Department of Education to help contribute to system-level improvement.

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

Four years ago, in the predecessor school, progress for students was significantly below national averages at the end of Key Stage 4. As a result of the transformation within the school, for a number of years the school has had positive progress measures, including disadvantaged pupils outperforming their non-disadvantaged peers. Attendance for the school is above the national average including for disadvantaged pupils.

The impact of Leigh Academy Tonbridge's work is replicable because it is grounded in clear principles rather than context-specific conditions.

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

Michael Crow, Principal, michael.crow@tonbridge.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>)