

Link Secondary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	133742
Local authority	Sutton
Inspection number	381547
Inspection dates	9–10 July 2012
Lead inspector	Charles Hackett

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	49
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	9
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Norton
Headteacher	Joe Pearson
Date of previous school inspection	12 November 2008
School address	82–86 Croydon Road Beddington Croydon CR0 4PD
Telephone number	020 8688 7691
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Introduction

Inspection team

Charles Hackett

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed teaching and learning in 11 lessons, observing the school's six full-time teachers, one part-time teacher and a lesson taken by one of the school's three speech and language therapists. Meetings were held with staff, three members of the governing body, including the Chair, and the director of the charity which manages the school. Discussions were held with students about their work and their views of the school, and students were heard to read.

The inspector observed the school's work, and looked at students' work and information on their progress, safeguarding policies and other documents were evaluated. Questionnaires completed by 36 parents and carers, 29 staff and 31 students were scrutinised.

Information about the school

The Link Secondary School is a smaller-than-average special school. The school caters primarily for students with speech and language difficulties. There are a number of students who are also on the autistic spectrum. All students have statements of special educational needs. Students are admitted from the local borough of Sutton, a number of other London boroughs and nearby counties. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. A few students are in the care of the local authority. Most students arrive in Year 7 and progress through the school to Year 11. A number of students then move on to the school's sixth form provision. A few join the school at this stage. The school is staffed by teachers and support assistants, and also employs three full-time speech and language therapists, a counsellor, a part-time occupational therapist and visiting Drama and Music therapists. The school is one of two run by the charity, Link Day School Limited.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- The Link Secondary School is a good school where students achieve well. The sixth form is good. It prepares students well for the next stage in their education. The school is not yet outstanding because of a few inconsistencies in the effectiveness of teachers' planning of lessons and some limitations the accommodation places on the curriculum.
- Achievement is good. Students make excellent progress in developing their communication skills, becoming more confident to understand verbal information and express themselves in a variety of situations. Students achieve external examination success and close the attainment gap that existed with their mainstream peers when they were admitted to the school.
- Teaching is effective because of its positive impact in addressing students' special needs. Teachers and therapists combine very well together, setting high expectations for students' achievements. The planning of lessons does not always ensure that the objectives for each student's learning are sufficiently precise, build on previous achievements and challenge higher-ability students.
- Behaviour is excellent and students develop extremely positive attitudes to learning. Students show respect for each other in such a positive way that all gain the confidence to engage in a wide range of learning experiences both on and off site. Students stress how safe they feel because, as one student explained, 'everyone trusts each other'.
- Senior staff and the governing body have very high aspirations for the quality of the school's provision. Teaching and learning have been improved through rigorous monitoring of performance and comprehensive professional development opportunities provided for staff. Performance data are tracked carefully and support interventions put in place when required. The curriculum is well balanced and has a strong focus on developing students' communication skills. The accommodation has been improved but prevents a few aspects of

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design and technology, music and art and design from being offered and restricts curriculum opportunities for the sixth form.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Over the next term, improve the quality of lesson planning through:
 - ensuring that learning objectives for each student always take note of their prior learning
 - the learning objectives for each student are precise
 - higher-attaining students are always sufficiently challenged by the tasks set.
- Over the next academic year, extend the curriculum experiences for all students, including those in the sixth form, in art and design, design and technology and music.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students greatly improve their skills in both their expressive and receptive language. Achievements in passing English Speaking Board examinations, for some students to a high proficiency level, the equivalent of AS level, is a clear indication of the standards students achieve. As a result of the progress they make, students become much more confident in their ability to express themselves and hold discussions with others. The benefits of this are seen throughout the curriculum. Typically in lessons, students are able to listen carefully to the teacher, understand what has been said and follow the advice given as to how they can put forward their own views. For example, in Year 7 and Year 9 English lessons observed, students followed the guidance of teachers and were confidently able to deliver presentations to the rest of their class. Other students were sufficiently confident to give their opinions on style and what they might do to improve even further.

Students make good progress in developing their literacy skills. They enjoy and become more confident in being able to read a range of books. Many use phonics (the blending of letter sounds) to develop their reading skills. Others, because of their limited capacity for phonological awareness, develop a range of alternative strategies, such as the use of symbols to help with the sight recognition of letters and words. A scrutiny of students' written work shows that they also make good progress in understanding sentence structure and building up their grammatical skills. Work in other subjects, notably in art and design, shows the good progress students make, although for art and design, design and technology, and music the limited facilities available reduces the range of topics in which they can achieve.

The school has collected considerable data on the progress made by students. Appropriately, this has been analysed very carefully and comparisons made with

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expected national rates of progress. These comparisons confirm the good progress of students. This year, this includes mathematics, which is an improvement on progress in this subject in the previous year. Achievement data show that there is no significant differences in the performance of any groups of students, including the very few in the care of the local authority. Parents and carers rightly believe their children achieve well.

Quality of teaching

Teachers set high expectations for students to achieve. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, the teacher was very clear how she expected students to sit, take turns and look forward when addressing each other. Students responded positively and visibly improved their skills as the lesson progressed. A major strength of the quality of teaching is the seamless link that exists between teachers and the speech and language therapists. They work together very effectively to address students' specific needs. Throughout the curriculum, they focus very well on aspects such as improving students' understanding of spoken language. Typically in lessons, teachers give students time to process what has been said to them and the confidence for them to respond with their own thoughts.

A focus on promoting students' independence is a strong feature of teaching throughout the school. Often, teachers and support assistants step back and, while offering encouragement, stress how important it is for students to 'give it a go' for themselves. Teachers make good use of information and communication technology. They use tablet computers well to record students' discussions and as aids for individual students to communicate with others; the school's internet learning platform is fully accessible at students' homes. Parents' and carers' positive views on the quality of teaching in the school are fully justified.

Teachers' good subject knowledge is often used well in setting tasks that interest and motivate students. For example, in a Year 10 science lesson, students enjoyed undertaking a range of tests to consider different forms of insulation and how an input of energy generates an output. Students made excellent progress because the teacher skilfully matched the tasks to students' different ability levels and took note of previous learning. On a few occasions, teachers' planning is not as effective. At these times, the activities of the lesson do not build on what students have completed previously or show what exactly it is that each student is expected to learn in a lesson. This can result in higher-ability students not being fully challenged by the work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents, carers, students and staff are all very positive about the behaviour and safety of students. Students themselves make a major contribution to the highly positive environment of the school. Typically, they are very courteous and respectful, recognising and valuing each other, irrespective of individual students' special needs. Students stress how safe they feel in school and how everyone trusts each other.

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Behavioural records and students' comments show that any incidents that could be classified as bullying are extremely rare and addressed promptly. Students have an excellent understanding of bullying and report that there is always an adult there to talk to if they have any concerns. Cyber-bullying is taken very seriously and the school's learning platform has been adapted creatively to allow it to act as a safe social internet network, only accessible to members of the school community.

The excellent behaviour of students has an extremely positive impact on their learning. In lessons, they cooperate with each other very effectively. For example, in a sixth form information and communication technology lesson, students worked exceptionally well in pairs evaluating the quality of their work. Likewise, Year 7 students showed similar attributes and combined very efficiently for a whole-class presentation for their forthcoming English Speaking Board examination. Lunchtimes are particularly pleasant experiences that do much to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Classes eat together but before doing so all share a few quiet moments to reflect on the day. Students demonstrate exemplary manners and enjoy chatting about a wide range of topics with each other. Students' views are considered very carefully; the school council meets regularly and staff take the observations of students seriously. Students' enjoyment of school is demonstrated very clearly by their very high attendance records.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, senior staff and the governing body demonstrate very strong ambition for the effectiveness of the school. Through a well-established process of self-evaluation, they have built on its strengths to such an extent that the high quality of its specialist provision is now being accessed by an increasing number of local authorities. A major strength of the school's provision has been the appointment and development of its own speech and language therapy team. These therapists have been supported to further their qualifications to 'masters' level and they play an increasingly central, effective role in shaping the approaches adopted by staff to support students' speech and language difficulties.

Much has been done to develop the quality of the school's provision. For example, rigorous systems have been put in place to monitor and develop the quality of teaching. Regular observations have identified stronger and weaker aspects of teachers' work. Good opportunities for professional development and regular performance management reviews have been put in place to address any emerging concerns. Although a few inconsistencies exist in lesson planning, the impact of these improvements is reflected in the increasing rates of progress of students, particularly in mathematics, over the last year. These improvements show the good capacity the school has to sustain its quality of provision.

The school has improved the suitability of teaching, therapy and recreational areas both in and outside the building since the previous inspection. These improvements have helped ensure that students are offered a well-balanced curriculum, with an appropriately strong focus on communication and good off-site learning experiences.

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The vocational training, including enterprise projects, offered to the sixth form students is particularly effective. Good opportunities exist for all students to achieve well in art and design, design and technology, and music but the breadth of topics that can be offered in these subjects is restricted by the limited specialist facilities available. Similarly, although much has been done to develop the sixth form, the facilities available for students are limited. The school recognises these deficiencies in the accommodation. It is considering whether they can be best addressed by extending the accommodation or by more use of off-site facilities. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well by the curriculum and the wide range of activities out of school they can take part in.

The governing body uses its considerable range of specialist backgrounds to support many aspects of the school's provision. It monitors health and safety very carefully, which contributes significantly to the very high profile given to safeguarding throughout the school. Child protection procedures are exemplary. The governing body and senior staff seek to provide all students with equality of opportunity to achieve and ensure that no form of discrimination is tolerated.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



11 July 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Link Secondary School, Sutton CR0 4PD

Thank you for being so helpful when I came to visit your school. It was good to talk to so many of you. Thank you so much to the five students who showed me some of their work and talked about what was special for them at the school. The success so many of you have in being able to greatly improve your communication skills and fully engage in lessons is very good to see.

I have judged your school to be good. I can see that you work hard in lessons, and that your behaviour and the respect you show towards each other and the staff is exemplary. I am very impressed with how well the therapists work closely with your teachers and support assistants. I consider both your achievements and the quality of teaching to be good. The school accommodation has been developed very well and helps ensure you feel very safe. The staff clearly know you well and are very keen for you to do well. For example, you were well prepared for your English Speaking Board examinations later in the week.

The headteacher and governing body make sure the school runs effectively and is being well developed to meet your needs. For the school to be even better, I have asked for the following two aspects to be improved further:

- improve the quality of lesson planning so that it helps you achieve even more
- extend the experiences offered in art and design, design and technology and music to enable you to cover even more topics in these subjects.

I hope that you all continue to work hard in your studies and that you were successful in the examinations you took later in the week.

Yours sincerely

Charles Hackett
Lead inspector

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