

New Line Learning Academy

Boughton Lane, Maidstone, ME15 9QL

Inspection dates

7–8 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The leadership has not yet had enough impact on improving the quality of teaching across the school or the progress of the students.
- Not enough students make or exceed the progress they should in English and mathematics.
- Students who are at risk of underachieving are not identified quickly enough and given the support they need.
- Leaders have not reviewed the effectiveness of the present organisation of subjects on the school timetable.
- There is not enough good teaching in the school. Teachers do not always fully engage the students, match the work to their ability, encourage them to become more independent learners or use questioning and marking effectively.
- Performance targets for teachers are insufficiently challenging and do not include a target on student progress.
- There are not enough opportunities for the sharing of good teaching practice.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders are taking robust action to make this a better school and there are clear signs of improvement.
- Students make good progress in the performing and visual arts as well as vocational subjects, where standards are above average.
- There have been significant improvements in the behaviour and attendance of students.
- Governors hold the school to account and have taken strong action to address previous shortcomings in leadership and present teaching weaknesses.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 36 lessons, of which five were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, Executive Officer for the Future Schools Trust, senior leaders, staff and groups of students.
- Inspectors took account of the 29 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire and the 43 responses from the staff questionnaire distributed for the inspection.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of evidence, including the school evaluation form, the academy development plan, the system to track students' progress and records relating to behaviour and attendance. They also looked at records of lesson observations by senior staff, performance management information, safeguarding documentation, external monitoring reports and a sample of students' work.

Inspection team

Stephen Walker, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
David Webster	Additional Inspector
Marion Lewis	Additional Inspector
Sa'ad Khaldi	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- New Line Learning Academy converted to become an academy in September 2007 after the amalgamation of two secondary schools.
- It is one of two academies run by the Future Schools Trust in Maidstone. New Line Learning and Cornwallis Academies share a governing body and an Executive Officer for the Trust.
- The new building for the academy was completed in September 2010.
- The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds. There is a small number from various minority ethnic backgrounds.
- A larger-than-average proportion of the students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, pupils from armed services families and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported through school action, or at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs, is above average.
- The school has specially resourced provision for 12 physically handicapped students. At the time of the inspection, there were eight students in the specialist provision. All students take part in normal lessons and activities in the school.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The academy has specialisms in business and enterprise, and in vocational studies.
- A small number of Key Stage 4 students take alternative provision at work-based off-site courses with the local Skills Centre.
- The headteacher has been in post since October 2011.
- The school has achieved National Healthy Schools status.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the standard of teaching to good or better by making sure that all teachers are:
 - engaging the interest of all students so that they retain concentration in lessons
 - planning and setting work that is at the right level for all students, so that it is not too easy or too hard
 - finding opportunities for students to work more independently
 - developing the use of questioning to involve students more in their learning, check their understanding and extend their thinking
 - using marking to show students how to improve their work and gain their target grades.
- Raise the attainment and progress of students in English and mathematics by:
 - motivate more students to meet and exceed expectations of progress in English and mathematics
 - providing additional support for all students at risk of underachieving and not making the progress they should
 - developing strategies to accelerate the progress of boys
 - helping students to develop their skills and confidence in reading, speaking and writing
 - supporting students to gain the key skills in numeracy and apply them effectively when

solving mathematical problems.

- Making sure that leadership and management is more effective in driving school improvement by ensuring that:
 - systems to improve teaching are used effectively to eliminate teaching which is inadequate or requires improvement
 - leaders encourage the greater sharing of good practice in teaching from within and outside the academy
 - teachers' performance targets are more challenging and include a target on student progress
 - leaders review the subjects taught and the allocation of time for each subject in order to provide a broader experience for the students and support better progress.
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Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Standards in English and mathematics are not high enough to demonstrate good progress from their low starting points. The proportion of students making and exceeding the progress they should is well below that found nationally. Although standards are improving each year, the percentage of students who gain five A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics is still well below average.
- Students' skills and confidence in reading, writing and speaking are not consistently developed across the school. Key skills in mathematics are weak and many students have difficulties with calculations and problem solving. Boys frequently make less progress than girls, particularly in English and mathematics.
- The academy has not in the past challenged enough students to meet and exceed expectations of progress in English and mathematics. Students are now given more demanding attainment targets to demonstrate good or better progress. Assessment information for the present year indicates that, although more students across the different year groups are on course to make the progress they should in English and mathematics, few are on course to exceed expectations.
- The systems for tracking students' progress, and the support provided for underachieving students, are leading to improved progress. There has been a strong emphasis on supporting borderline C students in Year 11 which has improved results. However, some students across the year groups who are not making the progress they should are not identified and supported quickly enough.
- The academy has used its specialist status well to raise standards in vocationally related subjects, where standards at GCSE are above national averages. Standards are also above average in the performing arts at GCSE. The small numbers of Key Stage 4 students who now take work-related courses off-site benefit from the practical approach to learning and make reasonable progress.
- The school's policy is to enter most students in Year 10 and 11 early for GCSE in English and mathematics. When they resit in the summer of Year 11, individual students gain higher grades although the percentage of students gaining A* to C grades is still well below average.
- Most disabled students and those who have special educational needs make progress in line with their peers. The support from other adults helps them to overcome barriers to learning. The physically handicapped students from the specially resourced provision are supported effectively on an individual basis and take a full part in all lessons. There are signs that more students with a statement of special educational needs are presently making better progress in Key Stage 3 due to well-planned support for these students from Year 7.
- The school is using additional funding adequately to narrow the gap between the achievement of students eligible for the pupil premium and the other students. However, the attainment and progress of free-school meals students is still below that of the other students. Money is allocated for teaching assistants to provide extra support in reading, writing and mathematics, which is enabling many of them to catch up with their learning.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching is not consistent enough across the school to be good overall and students do not make enough progress in some lessons. Although there is evidence of good or better teaching across most subjects, there are too many lessons where the quality of teaching requires improvement and a small number where the teaching is inadequate.
- Students focus and learn well when activities are interesting and engage them in the lesson. However, there are some lessons when the work does not fully capture their attention and they lose their concentration.
- Teachers are generally conscientious in the planning of their lessons but they do not always make sure that the tasks are set at the right level for the students. Some students are unable to progress at a sufficient rate because they do not completely understand the topic and find the work too difficult. On the other hand, a number of students find the work too easy and are not sufficiently challenged by some of the tasks.
- In some lessons, students are too passive and are not actively involved in the lesson. Not enough teachers encourage students to work independently and take responsibility for their own learning. Some teachers talk for too long and give answers to the problems too quickly.
- Some teachers are very skilled at asking questions to support learning. However, a significant number of teachers are not making enough use of questioning to engage students in lessons. They do not check sufficiently whether the students understand the work and are not using questioning to challenge them in their learning.
- There is inconsistency in marking across the school. In too many classes, marking does not indicate to students how they can improve their work to gain their target grades. However, a number of teachers are involving students in evaluating their own and each other's work, and making sure that students respond to the suggested areas for improvement.
- Many teachers are using information and communication technology well to accelerate learning, including the good use of the interactive whiteboards and the students' personal laptops. Students respond well to teams of teachers working together in the 'Learning Plazas' and make good progress when this type of teaching is organised well. Similarly, the more practical approach of learning in many of the performing art and vocational subjects in Key Stage 4 engages the students so that they make good progress in many of these lessons.
- In lessons where students make good or better progress, they are eager to take a full part in the learning and teachers display high-quality questioning skills to challenge students and encourage independence. For example, Year 11 students made rapid progress as they explored the influences on the self-image of individuals in a Health and Social Care lesson. The teacher skilfully used questioning to engage all the students in discussion and then encouraged them to use their laptops to research further evidence to develop their individual understanding of the topic.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The majority of students behave well in lessons and around the site, and this contributes to a calm, safe and orderly environment. There are clear expectations of behaviour and consistent systems to deal efficiently with any misbehaviour. Students are increasingly encouraged to take

responsibility for managing their own behaviour.

- There has been a marked decrease in incidents of misbehaviour and suspensions from the academy. Parents, carers and students confirm that there has been a considerable improvement in behaviour since the completion of the new building as students take particular pride in the new facilities.
- Students are generally considerate, polite and courteous to staff and each other and this has a positive effect on the learning environment in the academy. Students are growing in confidence and develop good-natured relationships with staff. They are beginning to develop their self-assurance in speaking with adults.
- Bullying of any kind is rare in the academy and students say that any unkind behaviour such as name-calling or teasing is dealt with quickly and effectively. Students are aware of the different forms of possible bullying, such as cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying related to sex, gender, race and disability.
- The inspectors found that the small number of students who display challenging behaviour are managed well and are not allowed to disrupt the learning of the other students. However, a few students lose concentration in some lessons when the work does not fully engage them.
- Students display a good understanding of the issues relating to safety. Students talk confidently about how they would keep themselves safe in a variety of situations, such as using the internet and social networking websites. They confirmed that the school provides them with information on sex education and the dangers of smoking, alcohol and drugs.
- Most students attend regularly and are punctual to lessons. There has been a significant improvement in attendance and reduction in persistent absence due to rigorous monitoring and supportive links with families. Attendance is now in line with the national average, which reflects a considerable improvement from previous years.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The leadership is not yet having enough impact on improving students' progress and the quality of teaching. There are clear signs that this is becoming a better school but there is still some way to go to ensure consistently good teaching and good progress in all subjects. However, there are already significant improvements in the behaviour and attendance of students.
 - The headteacher and senior leadership team are working closely with governors to raise standards in the school. The headteacher challenges underperformance and has made some changes to staffing to address this issue. He is presently addressing the small amount of inadequate teaching but has not yet ensured that teaching across the school is mostly good or better.
 - Decisions made about teachers' salary progression are clearly based on the quality of teaching, as observed by senior staff, and the progress of their pupils. Teachers are held fully accountable for the progress of their students, although performance targets are not sufficiently challenging and do not always include a target on student progress.
 - Lesson observations by senior leaders identify areas for development for individual teachers and some teachers are given additional support. However, there is insufficient sharing of good
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practice from within and outside the academy to transform the majority of teaching to good or better.

- The provision of modern foreign languages across the school is not fully effective due to some inadequate teaching. There is presently no provision for music, resistant materials, graphics or electronics in Key Stage 3. The school has not fully reviewed the effectiveness of the present subject organisation or the allocation of time for each subject in relation to accelerating student progress in core subjects or providing them with a broad range of experience.
- There is a good provision of vocational options in Key Stage 4, which supports greater engagement by the students. A range of outside visits and out-of-school activities increase students' enjoyment and experience of school. The range of experiences contributes to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The Future Schools Trust is very supportive and works closely with the senior leaders. There is close cooperation with Cornwallis Academy, which allows the productive sharing of staff.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is well informed about the academy's progress and areas for development. Its members are fully involved in monitoring progress and in holding leaders and staff to account. Senior leaders ensure that governors have a good understanding about students' achievement in relation to other similar schools and the quality of teaching. This allows them to make confident decisions on salary progression. They have taken strong and appropriate action to address previous shortcomings in leadership and are now tackling inadequate teaching. Robust procedures for safeguarding meet statutory requirements. Governors are proactive in overseeing the use of the pupil premium funding and ensuring that it is effectively spent to support eligible students. Governors are regularly undertaking professional training with an external consultant so that they are increasingly effective in their role.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	135372
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	402698

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	571
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ray Harris
Headteacher	David Elliott
Date of previous school inspection	3 March 2010
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