

Linslade Academy Trust

Mentmore Road, Linslade, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 2PA

Inspection dates

26–27 March 2014

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

- From the time pupils join the school, too few, including the most able, make the good progress of which they are capable.
- Standards in writing are below average.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium make slower progress than their classmates.
- The quality of teaching is not strong enough to ensure good progress for all pupils. This is because some teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low.
- Pupils are not given enough examples of what quality writing looks like to enable them to extend their writing skills.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise and apply their mathematical skills.
- Pupils are not always expected to correct their work or answer the questions teachers ask, designed to make them think hard, in their marking comments. This limits how well their work improves.
- Over time, leaders, including governors, have not secured consistently good teaching and achievement.
- Governors are not clear about how to use the pupil premium to ensure that eligible pupils achieve as well as their peers.

The school has the following strengths

- The new leaders, including governors, have raised expectations considerably. They have identified the key priorities for improvement and are acting on them.
- Systems for holding teachers and leaders to account for their performance are getting stronger. As a result, the quality of leadership and teaching is improving, leading to increasing rates of pupils' progress.
- Recent opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills across different subjects are helping to raise standards.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is above average. They feel safe and their behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. They enjoy good relationships with staff and each other, which contributes to a positive working atmosphere in all classes.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 24 parts of lessons taught by 23 teachers. They also observed small-group support sessions. Eight of these observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with four governors, staff, and groups of pupils. The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with the Chair of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at documentation including teachers’ planning, the school’s analysis of its strengths and weaknesses and resulting development plans, information on pupils’ attainment and progress, records of the monitoring of teaching and governing body meetings, safeguarding documentation and samples of pupils’ work.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, spoke with them about their learning and behaviour and reviewed the work in their books.
- Inspectors considered the 144 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and 42 responses to the staff questionnaire. They also took into account the results of school’s recent survey of parents’ views and spoke informally to parents as they collected their children from school.

Inspection team

David Radomsky, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Angela Podmore	Additional Inspector
Susan Sutton	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Linslade Academy Trust converted to become an academy school in June 2011 before the previous inspection.
- This middle-deemed-secondary school is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding which in this school supports pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and children of services families) is below average.
- Most pupils come from White British backgrounds, with the remainder coming from a range of minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Students attend only courses taught at the school and currently none attend any off-site alternative provision.
- The school is known as a 'Values Education' School. This means that pupils are regularly taught values that develop their social and relationship skills.
- Since the previous inspection there have been a large number of staff changes including subject, pastoral and senior leaders, some of whom took up their posts at the start of the current term. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2012 and a new deputy headteacher will take up post next term. Many of the current governors are new to their role and the current Chair of the Governing Body was elected in December 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school so that all pupils consistently make good or better progress by:
 - showing higher expectations of what all pupils can achieve, including the most able
 - checking that pupils respond to teachers' guidance and questions to improve their work
 - making sure that all pupils read enough to make the progress of which they are capable
 - exposing pupils to examples of high quality literature that will improve their literacy skills
 - planning more opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their mathematical skills.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders, including governors, by ensuring that:
 - all subject leaders rigorously check their areas of responsibility and take decisive action to remedy any shortcomings so that standards continue to rise
 - the governing body checks the impact of pupil premium funding to make sure that eligible pupils achieve well.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Pupils join the school in Year 5 with broadly average levels of attainment in English and mathematics. They make inconsistent progress as they move through the school and pupils, including the most able, do not always reach the levels of which they are capable.
- Standards reached at the end of Year 6 are below average in writing and broadly average in reading and mathematics. In the 2013 tests, the proportion reaching the highest level in mathematics was well above average.
- Attainment at the end of Year 8 in 2013 was below national expectations in writing, in line with expectations in reading and above expectations in mathematics. This represented slow progress in writing and progress that required improvement in reading and mathematics from this group's starting point in Year 7.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium receive additional tuition and additional opportunities such as for instrumental tuition. These have not been effective in closing the attainment gaps between eligible pupils and their peers fast enough, as they are still making slower progress across year groups. In 2013, the attainment of eligible Year 6 pupils was the equivalent of 18 months behind their peers in mathematics, 13 months behind in reading and 12 months behind in writing.
- Progress in writing has been slow as pupils had too few opportunities to write extensively across different subjects and teachers did not always tell pupils how to improve their work. Occasionally, teachers did not ensure that guidance and work materials given to pupils were of a good standard. Improving writing has been a major focus across the school this year. The quality of resources are improving, pupils are regularly given good guidance on how to improve their written work and, more recently, pupils have been set extended writing tasks in all subjects. These changes are beginning to result in pupils making faster progress in their writing.
- Pupils enjoy reading and those who experience difficulties are helped, including through groups supported by the Year 7 'catch-up' funding. Reading is actively encouraged, for example, through Year 7 and 8 pupils reading to Year 5 and 6 pupils, 'readathons' and 'meet the author' activities. Pupils are given opportunities to read during tutor time and in English lessons, but a few do not make good use of these opportunities. Some teachers do not check the quantity and quality of books that pupils are reading and so a few do not read enough to reach the levels of which they are capable. This means that those pupils do not make good progress.
- In mathematics, pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise and improve their mathematical skills. These missed opportunities mean that pupils' progress is not consistently good. This year, the school has introduced a number of initiatives that are helping those falling behind to catch up, including through the use of small-group tuition funded through the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- The progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs requires improvement because, like their classmates, they do not make enough progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teachers' expectations of pupils' learning in some classes are not high enough and stops pupils making the good progress of which they are capable. Work set is too easy for some pupils. In one lesson, for instance, the majority of pupils retrieved facts from an information text; yet, subsequently they spent 10 additional minutes copying the same facts from the board. This sort of activity holds back pupils' learning, especially for the most able who are eager to get on with more difficult work.
- The quality of marking and feedback has improved this year and most teachers give pupils good guidance and targets for improvement. Books show, however, that pupils are not always expected to act upon the advice. This hampers how well their work improves.
- As a result of strong relationships with their teachers, pupils arrive punctually to lessons, ready and eager to learn. Pupils told inspectors that when they finish their work, they are usually given more to do. However, in some classes, pupils have to wait to be given additional tasks that challenge them to think deeper. Such time wasting slows progress.
- Not all teaching assistants are used well to support learning in classrooms, and support for pupils eligible for the pupil premium has not narrowed gaps in attainment fast enough. The new special educational needs coordinator, who joined the school at the start of this term, is currently reviewing this aspect of the school's work. Some teaching assistants help pupils in small groups to learn well, such as those with reading difficulties.
- Pupils do not get to see enough examples of high quality literature in class or around the school to extend their literacy skills or to help them when engaging in writing across different subjects.
- In some classes, the planned activities motivate pupils to work hard and the work set is well focused to help all pupils achieve well. For instance, in a history lesson on children's working conditions in Victorian times, pupils were captivated when discussing photographs from that era. This stimulated a lot of questions and debate. When the teacher set a range of writing tasks connected to the topic, each with appropriate challenge for the differing writing abilities of the pupils in the class, pupils were inspired to write a good quality descriptive account of children's lives in that era and think about how their lives are so much better.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They are keen to engage in conversation with visitors and are polite, welcoming and helpful. The relationships between pupils and with adults are positive and respectful. Their attitudes are well promoted through the 'value of week', such as 'respect' and 'tolerance' discussed in assemblies and with their teachers.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and are keen to learn. They arrive punctually to lessons with all the correct equipment and immediately settle down to work. They readily work together and help each other to learn. Even on the occasions when teaching is uninspiring, they mostly apply themselves and try their best.
- Pupils have been actively involved in writing the new behaviour policy. They say that the newly agreed rewards and sanctions systems are applied consistently, so on the odd occasion when there is disruption in the class, the teachers deal it with effectively.
- Pupils behave well around the school and take care of the environment. All pupils who bring a

packed lunch know that they are expected to take their personal litter home. Pupils eat sensibly in the dining room and members of the 'clean-up crew' help assist adults to ensure that the school is free of litter.

- Pupils value the many opportunities offered to them to take responsibility, such as serving on the school council, or being house captains and drama leaders.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils and their parents confirm that pupils feel safe in school. Pupils know that if they are experiencing any difficulties or have any concerns they can go to 'The Hub' where a caring adult will help them.
- Pupils are aware of the various types of bullying, including cyber bullying. They know how to stay safe, for instance, when using the internet and are well aware of 'stranger danger'. Bullying is rare and pupils are confident that when it occurs, it is dealt with promptly and effectively.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- There has been a high level of staff and governor turnover since the previous inspection, including at senior leadership level. The quality of teaching and of leadership has not been good and requires improvement.
- New subject leaders are receiving training to help them become effective in their roles. They are not yet consistently or rigorously checking their areas of responsibility, or taking decisive action to remedy any shortcomings so that standards continue to rise.
- Since the start of this academic year, the headteacher and governors have determinedly set about recruiting new staff, tackling underperformance and ensuring good quality training for all, including the governing body. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving and standards are rising. There is no complacency and senior leaders and governors know that much needs to be done to make all aspects of the school's work securely good.
- All members of staff are committed to building on these recent successes to improve the quality of teaching so that pupils leave the school with higher levels of attainment.
- No discrimination of any kind is tolerated. The school has introduced new systems this year for frequently checking on the progress of every pupil. Leaders are endeavouring to ensure that every pupil has an equal opportunity to succeed. The special educational needs coordinator has therefore this year used the information to establish a wider range of support programmes for underperforming groups of pupils. It is too early, though, to be able to judge the impact of this work on pupils' achievement.
- Good self-evaluation processes ensure that leaders know the school well. The school's raising achievement plan is a thorough document focusing on well-chosen priorities. The planned actions are helping leaders to drive forward a range of improvements in a coherent way.
- The headteacher and governors introduced new and rigorous appraisal systems this year. Teachers are targeted to improve the quality of their teaching in line with the national teaching standards and all are set targets for their pupils to make at least good progress. To support them in reaching their targets, teachers benefit from good quality training as well as opportunities to visit other schools to learn from good practice.
- The school has used some of the new funding to support sport and physical development by

paying for a school sports coordinator. She is training about 50 Year 8 students to become 'Young Sports Leaders'. These pupil leaders organise sporting clubs for younger pupils and coach them in a variety of activities. They also help out at some of the lower schools such as in organising 'run for fun'. School leaders are in discussions with the school council about acquiring new equipment to be used for lunchtime sporting activities beyond the standard football. As a sports college, the school always has offered an extensive range of sporting activities with high uptake. This ensures pupils' physical health and well-being.

- The curriculum supports good attitudes to learning, safety and respect for all people. There are not enough planned opportunities for pupils to practise their mathematical skills.
- Most parents who responded to Parent View or the school's recent survey of parents' views, or spoke to inspectors, were positive about all aspects of the school's work. A few expressed concerns about staff turnover and the impact it was having on their children, but they are now pleased with the changes that have taken place recently.
- Visits to France, museums, and opportunities to put on musical productions such as the recent performance of *Cats* enrich pupils' experiences. With these and other opportunities, the school makes sure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The effectiveness of the governing body has improved significantly in recent months. New members have brought considerable expertise to the school, including from the worlds of education, finance and personnel. Under the leadership of the new Chair, governors are undertaking training to improve their effectiveness. This has included training on pupil performance data, safeguarding and a recent day of working with the senior leadership team. They have a good understanding of how pupils are progressing. Although governors have identified the concern that the pupil premium funding is not closing attainment gaps fast enough and, thus, not providing good value for money, they have not been able to identify what changes need to be made to ensure that eligible pupils achieve well. Some governors visit the school, talk to staff and pupils and visit lessons. Governors are now considering how to make such visits more regular and formal for all governors. They are well informed through the detailed headteacher's termly reports about the school's work, including the quality of teaching. They offer appropriate support and challenge to the headteacher. Governors are involved in decisions as to whether teachers should be rewarded with pay rises and they set and review targets for the headteacher. The teaching and learning committee is at an early stage of holding subject and pastoral leaders to account for their performance. All statutory duties are met, including arrangements for safeguarding.

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	136766
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	427168

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	588
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elaine Rabbitt
Headteacher	Kate Smith
Date of previous school inspection	24 April 2012
Telephone number	01525 372640
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