

The Link Secondary School

82-86 Croydon Road, Beddington, CR0 4PD

Inspection dates 8–9 October 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Leaders have not been wholly effective in working with new and inexperienced staff to maintain the high quality teaching seen in the last inspection.
- Teaching is not typically good. Students are not always given suitably challenging work.
- Teachers do not routinely use their knowledge of students' previous learning to set work that encourages students to learn effectively.
- Teachers do not make the most of opportunities to develop students' writing skills in all subjects.
- Not enough students make the progress that should be expected of them given their age and levels of ability.
- The governing body is not rigorous enough in seeking out detailed information about students' achievement or the impact of additional government funding.
- Leaders do not analyse information about students' progress in depth. They do not have a complete picture of students' progress across the school or how this compares with that of similar students elsewhere.
- Plans to improve the school are not focused sharply enough on the most important priorities. Leaders do not make the most of the information collected on the quality of the school's work to develop precisely worded targets that will move the school forward.
- The sixth form requires improvement. The post-16 provision has the same shortcomings in leadership, management and teaching as the school.
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The school has the following strengths

- Students enjoy going to school. Attendance is high, with very little unauthorised absence.
- Behaviour in classes and around the school is good. Students display positive attitudes and are excellent ambassadors for the school. Relationships between students and staff, and between the students themselves, are excellent.
- Students make good progress in developing speaking, listening and reading skills.
- The curriculum is good. Students are provided with a good range of learning opportunities.
- Students are safe and well cared for. Equal opportunities are promoted well.
- Therapists make an important and effective contribution to students' learning and personal development.
- Virtually all leavers from school or the post-16 department move into further education or training.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and the work that it does.
- Leaders are now beginning to work well together to improve the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited all year groups. Full-time and part-time teachers were observed, as well as a speech and language therapist who was teaching a class. The inspector was accompanied by either the headteacher or deputy headteacher in over half of the 13 observations that took place. Other lessons were also visited for shorter periods.
- Meetings were held with: members of the senior leadership team; the middle managers responsible for English, mathematics and the post-16 provision; the Chair of the Governing Body; the trust’s director; the school’s strategic planning partner; and two speech and language therapists. Inspectors collected students’ views of the school from the planned meetings that were held with two groups and from the many conversations that were held with individuals.
- Inspectors considered the views of the 14 parents and carers who completed the on-line survey, Parent View. They also collected opinions from letters that were received from a few and directly from the group that attended a workshop that the school was running.
- Inspectors scrutinised the 26 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- A wide range of documentation was examined. This included information about students’ progress, attendance records, safeguarding procedures, the school’s own judgements about its strengths and areas for improvement, and development planning.

Inspection team

Mike Kell, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Clementina Olofunke Aina

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This small school is one of two that are run by the charity, The Link Day School Limited.
- The school has on roll students from Sutton and six other local authorities. Almost three quarters of students are boys.
- Students have speech, language and communication difficulties, although a high proportion also have autism. All of them have a statement of special educational needs.
- Students represent a very wide range of ethnic backgrounds, with White British being the predominant group. None have English as an additional language.
- The school receives pupil premium funding for about a sixth of its students, which is much lower than the national average. Pupil premium is additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals and for children who are looked after.
- There has been a very high turnover of permanent staff, including leaders and managers, since the previous inspection. The deputy headteacher and the coordinators for English, mathematics and post-16 provision have all been in the school for two years or less.
- Students have access to on-site counselling and therapies, such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and drama therapy.
- The school has long-standing partnerships with South Thames College, Carshalton Girls' School and Wallington Grammar School.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise students' achievement by improving the quality of teaching so that it is at least good by ensuring that staff routinely:
 - promote students' writing skills in all subjects
 - use their knowledge of all students' prior learning and current understanding when planning learning activities
 - ensure that all students have suitably challenging work that stretches their abilities.
- Make leadership and management more effective by:
 - analysing information about students' progress in order to get a clearer picture about trends and to see how students' achievement compares with that of similar students in other schools
 - ensuring that the governing body and school leaders work closely together to evaluate the school more rigorously and effectively
 - developing school improvement planning so that it is focused on the most important priorities and ensuring that leaders and governors keep a close watch on the school's progress
 - providing parents and carers with more information about their children's learning and progress.
- Develop the governing body so that it:
 - carries out more effectively its statutory responsibilities to check plans for spending additional government funding and the impact that it has, and to ensure that the school website provides all of the information that it is required to contain
 - ensures the receipt of regular, comprehensive reports about progress and achievement, which it subsequently scrutinises, clarifies and challenges.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders have not addressed fully issues arising from the turbulence created by the high turnover of staff, including senior leaders and middle managers, that has taken place over the past two years.
- A high proportion of staff are new to this type of provision. Leaders have not been wholly successful in working with them to develop and refine their teaching to the extent that it encourages most effective learning. A minority of staff indicate that leaders could do more to develop teachers' classroom practice.
- Leaders audit the school's effectiveness, but this procedure is not always critical enough. Therefore, they have only partial understanding of how well the school is doing compared with the best provision and outcomes.
- The school improvement plan identifies development areas, but not all of them are key to raising standards. Some are entirely appropriate, such as the need to develop students' writing, but they are not written precisely enough to enable leaders and governors to check easily the school's progress towards achieving them.
- The governing body relies on a strategic partner to provide an external view of the school's effectiveness. However, no recent external reports suggest that the school has become less effective since the last inspection, and so the value of this support in moving the school forward is limited.
- Leaders use the information about students' attainment to focus additional support for individuals who are not making enough progress to meet short-term targets. They also check how well students do over the long term from their starting points when they enter the school. However, this exercise is not carried out in sufficient depth to provide a complete picture of achievement across the school. As a result, leaders cannot easily compare students' performance with that of similar students nationally.
- An overwhelming number of parents and carers are entirely supportive of the school, although a small proportion would welcome more regular information about their children's progress and forthcoming topics. They feel that they could then become more involved in supporting the work that is done in school.
- The very small amount of additional funding that the school receives is spent appropriately, such as to increase counselling services and to purchase laptop computers to address some students' particular communication needs. Leaders can show that these additional resources have had an impact, but they and the governing body do not have a routine procedure for checking that this funding is well spent.
- Students receive a broad and balanced range of learning opportunities that reflect the new National Curriculum. An effective work-related learning programme that includes work-related courses in college, work experience and an established business partnership contributes significantly to preparing students for leaving school. The curriculum is well planned to introduce students to the features of life in modern Britain.
- The school uses appraisal and performance management to set targets for staff that aim to improve the overall quality of the school's work. While these targets are relevant, staff cannot achieve some of them, such as improving elements of teaching, without more guidance from leaders.
- Safeguarding arrangements are well established and effective. An appropriate single central record of employees' suitability is in place and child protection awareness training is ongoing.
- Leaders have successfully established a calm, orderly and safe school. The school is particularly effective at promoting equality, encouraging positive relationships and establishing a culture of respect for all.
- Effective links with partners have been established. For example, Key Stage 3 girls can participate in drama sessions in a partner school, and students have access to specialist science resources in a local grammar school.
- The school has the capacity to improve because leaders and middle managers who are new to post are now beginning to work well together to tackle weaknesses effectively and move the school forward.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body receives only basic information about students' progress and governors are unaware of the level of detail that they should be insisting upon. Therefore, they are not in a position to scrutinise the school's performance in depth.
 - Governors do not monitor closely enough that they are fulfilling all of their statutory duties. As a result, although additional funding is used well, they do not have complete understanding of the impact of this funding on students. Furthermore, they have not ensured that the school website contains all of the information that is required.
 - Governors do not involve themselves enough in assessing the overall quality of the school's work, or in checking on the school's progress towards addressing key weaknesses.

- The governing body works closely with school leaders to ensure that all safeguarding measures are in place and working efficiently.
- Governors know about teachers' performance management and how it links to pay, but they do not receive sufficiently accurate information about the quality of teaching from leaders or the strategic partner.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Very good interactions between students, and between students and adults, are evident throughout the school.
- Students behave well in lessons, and are thoughtful and considerate of others when moving around the school and playing energetically in the playground.
- Instances of inappropriate or disruptive behaviour are rare, and when they do occur they are dealt with swiftly and efficiently.
- Students clearly enjoy school. Their attendance is high and they speak enthusiastically about the things that they do. They show great respect for the grounds, building and resources.
- Students have very positive attitudes to learning. They follow routines very well and are motivated to do their best.
- Conversations with students showed them to be courteous, respectful and caring, with the confidence to engage in discussions with strangers. They are developing into mature young people who are invariably positive about their futures.
- Parents and carers are unanimous in the view that the school does a good job in promoting good behaviour and the vast majority of staff agree.
- Students make good progress in all aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This prepares them well for living in modern Britain.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Safeguarding arrangements are applied rigorously. Parents and carers agree that their children are safe, and all staff agree that this is the case.
- Students are cared for well, as confirmed by parents, carers and staff. Nursing and therapy services and counselling make an important contribution to students' well-being.
- The students confirm that the school is safe. They say that there is no bullying or any other form of intimidation or harassment. Students of different gender, ethnic background and age work and play harmoniously together.
- Students develop a good awareness of how to stay safe. Travel training supports their ability to move around independently and safely on public transport. Furthermore, they have a very good understanding of safe internet use and of the potential risks of social media.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The overall quality of teaching requires improvement. There are pockets of good classroom practice that promote good learning; but, because of variation in the quality of teaching, students do not routinely make good progress in lessons.
- Teaching is not always effective because staff do not consistently use their knowledge of what each student has already learned to set suitable tasks. As a result, work is not always challenging enough. The most able students are not always stretched and others are not regularly given more difficult tasks to try once they have completed their work.
- Good teaching develops students' speaking and listening skills and their reading fluency in all subjects. However, teaching is much less effective in helping students to improve the quantity and quality of their writing in different situations. Teachers do not always make the most of opportunities to develop students' writing skills across different subjects.
- Teachers generally have a good understanding of the subjects that they teach, and they frequently pause lessons to check students' understanding of what they are doing.
- Therapists do much to enable effective teaching to take place. They work closely with teachers in establishing strategies to help students to overcome physical or communication barriers to learning, and in

developing resources.

- Teaching assistants play an important role in supporting students' progress. They frequently show initiative in helping students to learn.
- Teaching is characterised by good behaviour management, which is based on very good relationships between adults and students. Consequently, lessons are calm.
- Staff mark and assess students' work regularly, often in lessons with the student in attendance. In these circumstances, students get instant praise for their successes as well as guidance as to how aspects of their work can be improved. Expectations of students to check their work themselves and to assess how much their understanding or skills have improved are a feature of much of the teaching.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students do not make rapid enough progress overall, despite their very positive attitudes, good behaviour and high attendance. This is contrary to the views of parents and carers and staff. Both of these groups believe that students make good progress.
- Often expectations in lessons are too low and so students do not acquire new skills, knowledge and understanding quickly enough. In particular, the most able students do not always make the progress of which they are capable because they are not challenged consistently to do so.
- Standards in English do not indicate good achievement compared with the national picture for students of the same age and starting levels. Despite making good progress in speaking, listening and reading, students make insufficient progress in writing. Staff do not expect them to practise and extend their skills often enough across all subjects. The school has recognised this and it is a development area for this year.
- Some students in mathematics make the progress that is expected of them, and in a few cases exceed it, but overall their achievement is not yet good.
- No group of students does less well than any other. Boys and girls make similar progress, as do students from different ethnic backgrounds.
- There is no significant difference between the achievement of the few students who receive additional funding and others. Students who are eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after make similar progress to their peers in English and mathematics.
- Therapists make an important contribution to students' achievement. For instance, this could be planning by an occupational therapist to improve a student's posture, or a strategy devised by a speech and language therapist to develop a student's communication skills.
- Students acquire a range of accredited qualifications. Over the past two years, this has included a few instances of students achieving a GCSE grade C or better in subjects such as mathematics, science and art. The school does not enter students early for GCSEs because of their delayed communication skills.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- The post-16 department is led and managed by the same team that operates in school. There are shortcomings in the leadership of teaching, self-evaluation and improvement planning, as are evident in the main school.
- Teaching has many good features, such as activities that are well matched to students' ages and interests. There is a growing expectation that students will research and engage in discussion with classmates in order to solve problems for themselves. However, on occasion, expectations are too low and so students are not challenged.
- Students make good progress in developing their communication skills, other than writing. There is no planned, consistent approach to encouraging the development of progressive, more complex writing skills.
- The students are very positive about their education. They behave well, feel safe and are tolerant and supportive of each other. Their growing maturity and confidence are evident in the way that they show visitors around the school.
- There is a good emphasis on preparing students for independent living. English and mathematics focus on enabling them to use their skills to solve practical day-to-day problems, and there are many opportunities for them to develop self-help skills, such as independent travel on public transport.
- Careers advice, college links and work experience do much to prepare students for leaving school and moving into continuing education and training.

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	133742
Local authority	Sutton
Inspection number	448044

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
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	54
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	11
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Norton
Headteacher	Joe Pearson
Date of previous school inspection	9-10 July 2012
Telephone number	020 8688 7691
Fax number	020 8688 5522
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