

New Line Learning Academy

Boughton Lane, Maidstone, ME15 9QL

Inspection dates 4–5 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Progress has been too slow. Academy leaders have not yet secured consistently good teaching and so students do not achieve as well as they should.
- Information on students' progress is not always used well. As a result, work is sometimes too hard for some students and too easy for others.
- The proportion of students attaining five or more good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, is not high enough.
- Standards in science are too low. Recent changes have not had sufficient time to show an impact on students' learning.
- Too many students, particularly the most able, do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Disadvantaged students' achievement requires improvement because the gaps between their attainment and that of others are still too wide.
- Teachers' marking is not consistently effective in helping students to improve. The guidance given is not always targeted on what students need to do to raise the standard of their work.
- Students' written work is too often inaccurate or incomplete.
- A few students have little enthusiasm for learning. This limits what they can achieve.
- Students are not as well prepared for some aspects of life in modern Britain as they should be.

The school has the following strengths

- The Principal is fully supported by his senior team. They have a very clear understanding of where strengths and weaknesses lie and have high aspirations for the future. Staff and students share their vision for a highly successful academy.
- Key initiatives recently introduced to improve teaching and achievement have had a positive impact on standards, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Good support for disabled students and those with special educational needs, including those taught in the resource base, enables them to make good progress, particularly in reading.
- Students feel safe and extremely well cared for. Their health and safety is given a very high priority. The academy atmosphere is calm and orderly, and students behave well.
- Interim Academic Board governors have an excellent understanding of the academy and provide a high degree of challenge, aimed at improving teaching and students' standards.
- Major improvements have been made in the range of courses students can follow. Time available for subjects is now balanced and this is helping to lift standards.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 32 lessons and part lessons, including eight joint observations with the Principal or Deputy Principals.
- Inspectors also visited the resource base, tutor time, reading time and an assembly.
- Students' work was scrutinised informally in lessons and through sampling.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents including information on students' achievements, policies, safeguarding information and records relating to attendance and behaviour.
- Meetings were held with students, both formally and informally, a range of staff including middle and senior leaders, and with representatives from the Interim Academic Board.
- Inspectors took into account 18 responses to the Parent View online survey, letters from parents and the views of 81 members of staff in questionnaires they returned.

Inspection team

Peter McGregor, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
John Edgar	Additional Inspector
Sue Cox	Additional Inspector
David Lucas	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- New Line Learning Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- It converted to academy status in 2007 and is one of a group of local educational establishments run by the Future Schools Trust. This includes another secondary academy, where all sixth form provision is managed, a primary school and a nursery.
- One year ago, governance was established through an Interim Academic Board of four. This reports to the Trust's governing body, which includes representatives of the sponsors and local people. The chief executive of the Trust, also a member of the Interim Academic Board, is a National Leader in Education.
- A below average proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- A below average proportion of students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students, and those who have special educational needs, is much higher than average.
- The academy has a resource base for 12 disabled and visually impaired students. At the time of the inspection, three physically handicapped students and one who is visually impaired were taught in the specialist provision.
- Nearly half the students are supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding used to support pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after). This is much higher than the national average.
- Eight students attend alternative provision at The Cedars and Kingsreach, both of which are centres that support students with particular needs. These students are dual registered on the rolls of the academy and the centres.
- Governors are responsible for a breakfast club on site.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that leadership and management take the necessary steps to secure a significant rise in students' achievement at the end of Year 11 through:
 - rigorous and regular checking of progress through the year, including that of disadvantaged students, so that an increased proportion of students can achieve good GCSE passes in English and mathematics
 - ensuring that standards in other subjects, most particularly science, continue to improve
 - ensuring that work set for the most able is always sufficiently challenging.
- Improve teaching so that it consistently leads to good or better learning by:
 - ensuring that teachers use information about students' attainment and check progress in lessons to make sure it is always good
 - improving the quality of marking so that clear targets indicate what must be done next and that students respond to these
 - establishing an expectation that students take pride in their work so that it is accurate, complete and well presented
 - ensuring all students have an enthusiastic approach to learning and a desire to achieve the highest standards of which they are capable.
- Ensure students are fully prepared for life in modern Britain.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because teaching is not consistently good and students do not achieve as well as they should.
- The Principal, with the full support of his staff team and governors, is striving to establish an academy with high expectations where students are very well cared for and are successful. Senior leaders are aware of the need to accelerate the pace of progress. A significant majority of staff who responded to the questionnaire considered leadership and management to be a strength of the academy.
- Poor performance is tackled robustly. This has resulted in staff changes, improved planning and better policies. As a consequence, progress in the current year is improving throughout the academy.
- Senior leaders check the quality of teaching and learning rigorously. The Principal has an accurate knowledge of the academy's strengths and improvement areas. Good-quality, personalised staff training in subject areas, as well as across the academy, is resulting in improved performance in humanities subjects and modern foreign languages, as well as English and mathematics. However, this is not always the case.
- In science, where standards have been low historically, recent staffing and other changes have not yet had a measurable effect.
- Most subject leaders are increasingly effective as they check progress and provide support for their colleagues.
- The academy has good systems for measuring students' progress and attainment regularly. These provide helpful information for the teachers, but leaders have not managed to ensure that all teachers use this information consistently and effectively.
- Very few parents responded to the Parent View online questionnaire. Several of those that did expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of the education provided. Academy senior leaders and governors work hard to develop closer ties with parents so that they can support their children's learning. They respond quickly and positively to any queries and concerns they receive from parents.
- The curriculum has improved since the previous inspection. The time allocated to English and mathematics has been increased to a good level. At the same time, leaders have ensured that students have access to a wide range of subjects in Years 7 and 8, such as music and aspects of technology. Vocational courses, such as finance, media and early years, meet students' needs well. The dedicated whole-academy reading session, a daily 15 minutes, is having a good effect on students' attitudes to, and progress in, reading. Clubs and activities, as well as subject-support sessions, are popular with students.
- The attendance, behaviour and progress of the small number of students attending The Cedars and Kingsreach are monitored by the local authority, which keeps the academy well informed. Senior leaders check the information carefully to ensure that the students are receiving the education they need.
- Careers education is good. Students, particularly those in Years 10 and 11, appreciate the guidance they receive in helping them select appropriate post-16 placements. The success of the process is apparent in the reduction, over the past two years, to a very small number of students who do not continue in suitable education and training.
- Students have equal opportunities to succeed because the academy values each individual and uses additional funding well to narrow gaps. Money received for disadvantaged students is used effectively to fund a wide range of additional support, such as teaching assistants, a family worker and for reading support. Additional funding for those students who entered the academy with standards in English and mathematics below expectations is also used effectively to raise standards.
- The resource base for physically handicapped and visually impaired students is well led and managed, as is provision for special educational needs in general. Students value the support which staff give them and they make good progress as a result.
- The breakfast club offers cereals and a good hot meal. Although numbers vary during the year, those that do eat a breakfast remark how good it is and how it helps them through the day. Disadvantaged students are not charged for their breakfasts.
- The academy receives substantial benefit from its membership of the Future Schools Trust, as expertise is shared amongst the schools. Teachers from the primary school work in the academy, and vice versa, aiding the transfer of pupils at age 11. The chief executive of the Trust provides highly effective advice and support to the academy's senior leaders.
- Safeguarding meets statutory requirements. Procedures are tightly managed to ensure that students' welfare has the highest priority.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills are developed appropriately. Students enjoy academy assemblies, where they are expected to reflect and think as well as listen carefully. For example, when

science and engineering careers were discussed, students showed great interest in how these could be relevant to their future. Tutor time, however, is variable in quality.

- Mutual respect and tolerance, lack of discrimination, and understanding of different faiths, races and cultures are high on the list of academy values. Students do not, however, have sufficient opportunities to gain a good understanding of British institutions and British democracy.

■ The governance of the school:

- The Interim Academic Board is a highly knowledgeable group of educationalists who provide a good balance of support and challenge for the Principal. They have regular meetings with him to check on progress in identified key areas and are very rigorous in their checks.
- Governors know the academy exceptionally well. They know about key performance information on students' progress, attainment, attendance and behaviour. They also know about what is taking place to bring about rapid improvements.
- Governors know that the academy system of rewarding teachers for their performance has been improved greatly since the previous inspection and is now directly linked to students' achievements.
- Governors check safeguarding and academy finances rigorously to ensure students' welfare remains the highest priority and money is spent efficiently and effectively.
- Funding to support disadvantaged students is checked carefully by governors, as is money received to support students who enter the academy with standards below expectations in English and mathematics. Governors measure the success of this work by its impact on academic standards.
- Governors know that the proportion of students attaining good GCSE passes is too low and progress is not good enough, and are fully supportive of the Principal as he makes difficult decisions to drive up standards quickly.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students are polite and welcoming, for example approaching a visitor entering a classroom, saying what they are being taught and offering to answer any questions. This provides an excellent opportunity for the students to discuss their learning with an adult.
- Students refer to the substantial improvements in behaviour and the quality of care they receive now compared with a few years ago.
- Information shows a marked decline in behaviour incidents and exclusions this year as new systems are applied. The focus is on rewards not sanctions, although students know the sanctions system very well. Internal exclusion in a centre within the academy works very well, as students are completing work for their usual subjects. Students who had experienced internal exclusion referred to how helpful it was in learning how to behave well.
- Most students behave well in lessons and have a good attitude to their learning. Most continue to work hard, even when the work does not interest them. However, a few students lose concentration and have little enthusiasm for learning, and this limits what they can achieve. Students know that off-task chattering is unacceptable and, as relationships between students are very good, peer pressure is a helpful aid to good behaviour.
- Students are very well behaved when working in the resource base and are keen to learn. Reports from the local authority indicate that students behave well in alternative provision and attend regularly.
- Students wear their uniform with pride and identify with the academy. The building is well looked after, with no graffiti or litter.
- Students walk on the left on the stairs, a system recommended by the school council, and maintain good behaviour during non-lesson time. They sit quietly in assembly and the dining area has a pleasant atmosphere at break and lunchtimes.
- Most of the staff who responded to the questionnaire about the academy referred to students' good behaviour. Discussions with support and teaching staff backed up the view that, because behaviour management systems are fair, students respond well to academy rules and behave well.
- Attendance has improved over time and is broadly average. The academy has successfully invested in additional staff, such as family support, as well as giving rewards to students for high attendance. Attendance information is analysed meticulously and, if patterns are identified, appropriate action is taken. Punctuality is good, supported by the 'countdown' to the start of each lesson displayed on all screens in the academy.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Students know that they can turn to a wide range of staff for support and that it is always provided.
- Students say they feel safe and there is minimal bullying or racist behaviour. If incidents occur, students are confident staff will follow them through until a solution is found. Homophobic language is not tolerated.
- Students are taught very effectively how to keep themselves safe against the potential risks of social media and inappropriate internet use. They understand the dangers associated with extremism and drug misuse.
- Adults and students are very well trained in following the academy's safeguarding procedures.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it is not consistently good across subjects. The legacy of weak teaching over time, as well as some current weaknesses, means that learning in science is not good enough.
- Teachers do not make the best use of information on students' background, progress and prior attainment in planning for lessons. The result is that the level of challenge for the wide range of ability, particularly in the larger combined groups, is not appropriate and so there is underachievement. The most-able and disadvantaged students are most affected by this teaching weakness.
- Where teaching is unsuccessful at generating students' enthusiasm and desire for learning, students are content with doing the minimum acceptable. This detracts from what they can achieve.
- Homework is not set as often the academy expects, a point made by some parents as well as the students.
- Marking is inconsistent. In the best practice, staff use an academy stamp which enables students to see what has been done well and how work can be improved. Teachers' expectations are not high enough. Checks are not always sufficient to ensure that students follow through on the targets set.
- Students' work in lessons is not thoroughly checked and so the standard of written work and presentation is not good enough. Too often, slower workers do not complete tasks.
- Recent actions taken by leaders to improve the quality of teaching are, however, resulting in noticeable improvements. This is apparent in the better progress students are making in English and mathematics.
- Vocational and practical subjects are taught well, sometimes exceptionally so, by staff with good, relevant subject knowledge. In the humanities and modern foreign languages, teaching is better than at the time of the previous inspection and students' progress is improving as a result.
- Teachers are effectively timetabled to teach their areas of expertise, with adjustments made during the year as staff changes occur. This enables staff to provide clear and accurate explanations in their teaching.
- Teaching assistants, now allocated to subject areas, are generally effective. Restricting the knowledge required of these staff is proving helpful, enabling them to provide better challenge and support in their questioning of students.
- Relationships between students and staff are very good, which has a positive impact on both behaviour and progress.
- The quality of teaching provided by the staff in the resource base for physically handicapped and visually impaired students is good. They know the students' needs well and provide good support.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because progress has been too slow and students do not achieve as well as they should.
- Achievement in science is too low and has been for several years. Staffing issues and weak teaching have caused the problem. Students' books and folders show inaccurate and incomplete work, indicative of low standards over time. There has been insufficient time for very recent staffing changes to show any impact on achievement information, but students are much happier with the situation as staff are keen to teach them.
- Standards in history and geography, and modern foreign languages, have been weak for some years, but evidence of students' work this year and progress in lessons show improvement. Academy information on

progress across all year groups indicates that there is improvement but it is not yet as strong as it should be.

- Since the previous inspection, students' standards in English and mathematics have risen. This reflects the good current staffing situation, good curriculum changes that have taken place and the effective teaching seen in these subjects. Nevertheless, from their below average starting points in Year 7, students' progress overall is not yet good enough and the proportion of students who achieve five or more good GCSEs including English and mathematics in Year 11 is too low.
- A substantial improvement has been made in the number of students who made the nationally expected amount of progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11. The proportion achieving this level was above average in English and average in mathematics in 2014. Too few students exceeded the national expectations in English and mathematics.
- The most-able students are underachieving and need a higher degree of challenge in a range of lessons, not just English and mathematics. The academy does not use early entry for GCSE.
- The academy's own information accurately predicted improvements in both English and mathematics in 2014 and the underachievement in other areas. This accurate tracking process indicates a consolidation in the English and mathematics progress at the nationally expected level this year. It also indicates an improvement in the number of students who exceed expectations in both English and mathematics. The proportion of good GCSE grades in English and mathematics is likely to increase in 2015.
- Achievement is good in practical subjects taken by students in all years, such as resistant materials and art, and vocational courses taken in Years 9, 10 and 11. Students appreciate the relevance of the work and make good progress over time.
- In 2014, in addition to the improvement in English and mathematics, the gap between the substantial number of disadvantaged and other students widened overall. Compared with other students in the academy, disadvantaged students were about one third of a GCSE grade behind in English, a worse position than in 2013 but better than 2012, and two thirds of a grade behind in mathematics, with an improving position over three years.
- Compared with other students nationally, disadvantaged students' results were lower overall. In English, the picture fluctuated over the past three years, with students a full GCSE grade behind in 2014. In mathematics, it is a positive three-year trend, but students were a grade and a third behind in 2014. The academy tracking information indicates that the situation is improving as a result of carefully targeted intervention. It shows a narrowing of the gaps in 2015 in both English and mathematics but disadvantaged students' progress still requires improvement.
- Students who have not achieved the expected standard in English and mathematics on entry to Year 7 make good progress. Reading ages and numeracy skills improve more quickly than usual because good programmes of support are provided.
- Physically handicapped and visually impaired students who use the resource base make good progress. This is as a result of the specialist support they are given in mainstream lessons and at other times. The large number of other students with special educational needs have historically not made sufficient progress. However, new initiatives, such as the focus on reading and social skills, anger management, and support staff allocated to subjects, have resulted in good progress for these students.

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	453631

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	610
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marilyn Hodges
Headteacher	David Elliott
Date of previous school inspection	7–8 February 2013
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