

Linslade Academy Trust

Mentmore Road, Linslade, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 2PA

Inspection dates	28–29 June 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has focused the staff on raising expectations and standards. Consequently, achievement is now good and improving.
- The governing body has been diligent in recruiting governors to secure relevant expertise so it can effectively support and challenge school leaders to keep doing better.
- The headteacher, supported well by the deputy headteachers and senior team, has been successful in improving the quality of teaching and middle leadership. New leaders in mathematics, English, science and in the senior team have secured rapid change.
- The appointment of a full-time special educational needs coordinator since the previous inspection has ensured that the identification and support for pupils has improved and is now good.
- Pupils are making good progress in most subjects. In areas where achievement has not been as strong, such as mathematics, progress is improving as a result of more effective teaching and leadership.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making good progress from their various starting points. Gaps between their achievement and those of their classmates are now reducing.
- Pupils are polite, courteous and cooperate well with staff. They enjoy coming to school. They display positive attitudes to school and most behave very well in lessons. They are rightly proud of their work and their successes.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some assessment and monitoring systems do not allow leaders to measure the effect of their work as efficiently and precisely as they could.
- There are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning where it has been difficult to recruit permanent staff.
- The school's new curriculum and assessment systems do not provide enough opportunities for the most able pupils to make rapid progress.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that pupils make more rapid progress by:
 - ensuring that the best practice in teaching and the use of assessment are in place in the few areas where there is still inconsistency, so that all teachers have the same high expectations of what pupils should achieve in each lesson
 - develop the curriculum and assessment systems so that they provide more opportunities for the most able to achieve rapid progress.

- Review, refine and consolidate the school's many monitoring and assessment systems so that leaders can be more efficient in measuring their effect on pupils' achievement.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher, other senior leaders, governors and staff have been committed in their dedication to improve standards at Linslade Academy Trust. Leaders' determination to recruit high-quality senior and middle leaders since the previous inspection has secured even greater capability to build upon and sustain their many accomplishments.
- Leaders know the school well. The self-evaluation plan is detailed, thorough and accurate in its analysis of the school. Leaders have identified the right priorities and have taken prompt action to improve the areas of concern, such as mathematics. They use the support commissioned by the local authority to actively seek out 'critical friends', such as the Chiltern Learning Trust, as well as seeking advice from a school improvement partner. Leaders have used this guidance fruitfully to review their provision and improve achievement.
- Leaders' rigorous work in checking teachers' performance and linking this to pay increases has improved the quality of teaching. Staff benefit from a range of training opportunities that are well linked to the needs identified in the performance management process. The school's 'triad' development programme is being used productively to allow teachers regularly to share their best practice with colleagues. As a result, teaching is effective and continues to improve.
- The quality of middle leadership has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Subject leaders are securing improvement in their respective areas. They monitor pupils' achievement and act quickly to support those pupils who are struggling or not making enough effort. Leaders have worked hard to recruit and train high-quality middle leaders and this is improving pupil outcomes in many areas, such as English, mathematics and science.
- New leadership to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has ensured that this support is now far more systematic and thorough. The special educational needs and disabilities coordinator has reviewed and refined the identification processes for pupils. Support plans make sure that the school meets pupils' welfare and academic needs. Teachers and learning support assistants are given additional time to liaise so that support in the classroom is more specific to pupils' needs. This helps them to make better progress. The special educational needs and disabilities coordinator also checks the quality of teaching, undertakes work scrutiny and supports staff to improve their practice, so that the right pupils get precisely targeted help.
- The curriculum prepares pupils well for the next stages of their learning. Pupils participate in, enjoy and appreciate a range of subjects and extra-curricular activities and trips. Literacy and numeracy are promoted throughout the school, with a particular focus on grammar, punctuation and spelling. New curriculum and assessment monitoring systems put in place since the previous inspection are thoughtful and well considered, and are helping the school to develop further opportunities for pupils to make even more progress. However, the assessment model used for the most able pupils does not always allow them to move quickly to the school's 'mastery' level. Leaders acknowledge that further work is required on developing this area to allow the most able pupils to make more rapid progress.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very well provided for within the curriculum. Assemblies, external visitors, trips, and visits are used to make their studies 'come to life'. The school council and the numerous opportunities that the pupils get to talk about democracy mean that pupils get to understand the relevance of concepts like equality, democracy, tolerance, respect and law. Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons are structured around the school's 14 core values. These are given focused curriculum time to ensure that pupils understand the relevance of each value. Pupils are also given considerable support to transfer into the next stage of their learning, including carefully thought-out transition days and regular visits between Linslade and the lower and upper schools.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is used constructively to support those pupils who did not achieve well enough in the assessments at the end of Year 6. Booster sessions, one-to-one tuition, small-group support and home-school resource packs are some of the examples of where the funding is being used. These are having increasingly and positive effect on improving pupils' knowledge and skills, and on meeting the emotional and welfare needs of some pupils who have very complex barriers to their learning.
- The additional funding that the school receive to encourage wider participation in sport among pupils in key stage 2 is being used very well. Linslade's 'young sports leaders' promote and support sport and fitness in their own school and other schools, and are valuable, first-rate role models for younger pupils. As well as this, additional sporting equipment, lunchtime active play, gym and dance showcases, additional sports clubs and more swimming lessons, are all ensuring that more pupils participate enthusiastically in sports and fitness.

- Leaders' use of the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used to good effect. The school has developed a comprehensive monitoring system that identifies the specific needs of pupils and allocates appropriate support and funding. For those pupils who may have social and emotional barriers to their learning, the valuable work of the school's 'hub', learning mentors and one-to-one counselling is improving pupils' self-esteem and confidence. The school also has targeted homework support, a before-school breakfast club, trips and visits, music tuition and funds pupils' visits to universities.
- Leaders, especially those new to post since the previous inspection, have been fervent in their work to implement improved assessment systems to ensure that they can accurately identify and support pupils who are at risk of underachieving. These systems are helping leaders to make a positive difference to pupils' learning. Leaders acknowledge that the abundance of these systems makes it difficult to maintain sharp evaluations of the effect of some of their work.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. The conscientious and committed chair of governors leads a governing body which challenges and supports leaders.
 - The governing body have recruited new governors skilfully to ensure that they have more expertise from many different sectors including education, police, safeguarding, finance, human resources and data analysis. They seek external reviews regularly and use these to improve their own effectiveness. Consequently, they are well placed to hold leaders to account for pupils' progress, and do so with vigour and success.
 - The governing body uses the array of information that they have about the school to hold the senior team to account. Governors visit regularly with a sharp focus on school improvement, receive regular and detailed information about the school's work and have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are well informed about the achievement of pupils and the quality of teaching. They use all this information collectively to ask insightful and challenging questions of the senior team.
 - The governing body is well aware of its statutory responsibilities, especially those linked to the safeguarding of pupils. Governors are well trained and they visit regularly to ensure that safeguarding procedures are effective. They review the recruitment of staff and ensure that they receive appropriate safeguarding training.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The record of checks of the suitability of staff to work with children is fully maintained and meets all requirements. Training for staff is up to date and ensures that staff know what to do if they have concerns. Staff are confident about how their concerns are dealt with. Pupils are taught how to stay safe as they access a curriculum which enables them to understand the risks they face, both online and in their day-to-day life.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is typically good. Leaders have focused intensely on raising the quality of teaching. Improvements in the quality of pupils' work and in teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are evident. The school's records of teaching and pupils' progress, alongside the high-quality work seen by inspectors, show that the majority of pupils make good progress and achieve well.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge to plan lessons which meet the needs of most pupils and ensure that time is used well. In a science lesson on germination, the teacher made sure that the complexities of the topic were made accessible for pupils in Year 5 through well-thought-out activities and an appropriate use of technical language. She also used questioning skilfully to challenge pupils' own answers and make them reconsider their hypotheses, using the knowledge that they had acquired.
- Teachers use assessment information skilfully to plan learning activities that are relevant to the pupils in the class. In a Year 7 mathematics lesson, for example, a teacher used targeted support and questioning to guide pupils to rectify errors that they had made individually, while also tackling some of the common misconceptions that pupils had shown.
- Most teachers invest sufficient learning time for pupils to reflect on their learning and make improvements where they have made mistakes or omissions. They give pupils opportunities to successfully reshape, correct or redraft pieces of work so that they make good progress. This was most notable in English, where inspectors saw examples in Years 6 and 8 of high-quality subject-specific guidance which helped pupils to make rapid improvements to their written work.
- The school emphasises pupils' literacy skills. Staff training has ensured that there is a consistent focus on

raising the quality of literacy support in all subjects. Highly effective examples of this were seen in all subjects, but were especially well developed in practical subjects, such as art and design. Most teachers challenge pupils, both in written work and orally, on the use of correct subject vocabulary and grammatical accuracy. Strong examples of this were seen by inspectors in English, French and humanities. As a result, pupils are able to articulate themselves increasingly well in both their oral and written responses.

- Leaders have placed greater emphasis on developing pupils' reading skills since the previous inspection. Pupils say that reading is important at Linslade and that they enjoy a variety of opportunities to read. Additional reading time, whole-class texts, extra tuition for pupils who need help in catching up, the online reading library, the variety of age-appropriate texts available, and the use of some funding to support the purchase of books for disadvantaged pupils, have all raised the profile of reading. Consequently, pupils read with increasing fluency and confidence.
- Homework is set regularly, and evidence seen on inspection and from talking to pupils indicates that this is helping to consolidate their learning. Homework clubs and support are taken up by many pupils, especially when they need to use computers or the internet. The use of 'reflection homework', which asks pupils to think about how they could improve and develop as learners, is also helping pupils understand how they can become independent learners. Pupils and most parents feel that the homework set is appropriate.
- Learning support assistants work successfully with class teachers to support the specific needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They use questioning well to further enhance pupils' understanding of topics and use a thorough knowledge of pupils' needs to help them develop independence in their personal care, welfare and learning. Skilled teaching assistants are also used for targeted additional support programmes in both literacy and numeracy. Consequently, pupils learn well in lessons.
- Weaker teaching, particularly where the school has struggled to recruit well-qualified staff, has hindered the efforts of the school to provide consistently good learning in some areas, especially in mathematics. However, new leadership in mathematics, better teaching and strong management mean that current pupils are making good progress. Pupils speak positively about the quality of their learning in mathematics. Leaders are aware that there are still some limited examples of weaker practice in the school and continue to provide a mixture of support and challenge to ensure that all teaching is good.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good
- Pupils enjoy the opportunities that they receive by attending Linslade Academy Trust. Trips to places of interest such as the Globe Theatre, the Science Museum and Warwick Castle, along with visits into the school by the Planetarium, bring pupils' English, science and history studies to life. The school uses its additional funding to ensure that disadvantaged pupils can join these visits alongside their classmates. Extra-curricular clubs include those for sports, film, chess, Latin, German and Spanish. Pupils speak highly of the chance to participate and many take full advantage of them.
- Pupils feel safe and cared for at Linslade. A range of curriculum material helps them to understand how to stay safe, both online and in the community. 'Stranger danger', assemblies, external visitors to the school, police talks and online lessons about cyber bullying are just some of the methods used by the school to give pupils the necessary understanding about the wider world and how to keep safe. Pupils also receive information about sexual education and healthy relationships, including visits to school by local healthcare professionals, to ensure that they develop an age-appropriate awareness.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of how to stay healthy, and leaders use the additional funding to provide more sporting and fitness opportunities effectively. Most pupils participate in the wide array of sports and fixtures. They enjoy lunchtime and after-school clubs and fixtures, such as cheerleading, football and rounders. The 'young leaders' are a large and active group of role models for younger pupils, both in the school and wider community.
- Coffee mornings and forums for parents have been created to extend the support offered by the school. These give parents opportunities to ask questions, express concerns and stay in touch over their children's education and development. They are also allowing leaders to educate parents about how they can support their children at home with their studies and their homework.
- The support that staff give to make sure that pupils are ready for the next stage in their education is thorough and helps them to feel confident and secure. Older pupils pair up with new Year 5 pupils as

'buddy be friends' when they first arrive at the school to make sure that they have a 'friendly face' when they change schools. Pupils and staff visit one another's schools, so that the faces and facilities become familiar to the pupils in Year 5, who are arriving into Linslade, and the pupils in Year 8, who are leaving to attend the upper school of their choice.

- Although bullying incidents are rare, they remain a concern for a small minority of pupils and parents. However, the rigorous systems in place to respond to such incidents are effective. Almost all pupils feel that bullying is not a problem in the school and, on the rare occasions it occurs, it is dealt with successfully.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils respect the learning environment. Displays are well maintained and attractive. Pupils move around the school calmly and respectfully. Even where space is more limited, they are careful and considerate of each other and the adults around them.
- Pupils' support for one another and their cooperation in their learning and their 'free' time are particular features of Linslade. Whether working in pairs or groups, or supporting a friend who needs some help, pupils are kind and thoughtful. Pupils of all age groups mix well at break and lunchtimes, and in school clubs. Older pupils enjoy the opportunities given to them by the school to be role models or buddies for younger pupils.
- Pupils value their lessons, as shown by their punctuality and willingness to learn. Almost all classrooms are purposeful and productive learning environments, where pupils can concentrate and enjoy learning. Pupils conduct themselves well and show self-discipline. Although a small minority of parents and pupils identify concerns about behaviour in lessons, most said that behaviour is good, and that, where poor behaviour occurs, it is dealt with swiftly. The school uses fixed-term exclusion sparingly for the most serious behavioural issues. A slight rise in the use of these sanctions took place earlier this year as a result of a 'no tolerance' attitude on an emerging area of concern, but almost all pupils have subsequently shown improvement and have not had any further fixed-term exclusions for poor behaviour.
- Although overall attendance in 2015 was below the national average, this is now improving. The number of pupils who are persistently absent remains low overall. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities had higher rates of absence than their classmates in 2015, but their attendance is now improving because of the effective personalised strategies used by the school to support them.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils join this school in Year 5 and leave in Year 8. Externally validated tests of pupils when they join the school, and school information for each year group, show that by the time pupils finish Year 8, they have made good progress from their starting points.
- Since the previous inspection, overall standards at the end of key stage 2 have risen from below the national average to broadly in line with it. This reflects a good rate of improvement for the school. However, pupils' achievement in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was not as strong as in reading and writing. School leaders have identified this as a priority for improvement. New leadership and improved teaching are now making sure that pupils make more rapid progress at key stage 2.
- Pupils in key stage 3 achieve well by the time they complete their studies at Linslade. Work in lessons, and that seen in their books, indicates that many pupils make good, or sometimes better, progress across many subjects. This is due to the effective teaching that they receive.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their starting points. Since the previous inspection, gaps between their attainment at the end of key stage 2 and that of their classmates closed considerably in 2014, although this was not sustained in 2015, mainly because of poorer attainment in mathematics. This is now being rectified through new leadership and better teaching in mathematics. Pupils are making better progress from their various starting points and achieving more in line with their classmates.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their varied starting points. This is because their needs are correctly identified and teachers plan lessons which meet the specific needs of these pupils. Although achievement in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was poorer in 2015, these pupils are being well supported in Year 7 to catch up.
- Leaders rightly identified from the 2015 results that the progress that the most able pupils made in the first two years at Linslade was not rapid enough to ensure that they achieved higher outcomes in the end of key stage 2 tests, most notably in mathematics and writing. Leaders have now secured external

validation and additional teaching capacity in these areas, alongside more targeted booster sessions. The most able pupils are currently making better progress in the initial two years and this continues into key stage 3. Consequently, the most able pupils, including some who are disadvantaged, are making better progress at Linslade but this is not always as rapid as it could be, especially in writing. Leaders are continuing to develop their new curriculum and assessment systems to support this further.

School details

Unique reference number	136766
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10011771

This inspection 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	565
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elaine Rabbitt
Headteacher	Kate Smith
Telephone number	01525 372640
Website	www.linslademiddle.beds.sch.uk
Email address	contact@linsladeac.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 March 2014

Information about this school

- Linslade Academy Trust converted to become an academy in June 2011.
- This middle deemed secondary school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most pupils come from a White British heritage, with a small proportion from minority ethnic groups. A small proportion speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported through the pupil premium (government funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after by the local authority) is below national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 24 lessons and four tutor sessions. A number of joint observations were carried out with senior leaders. Inspectors also scrutinised work from science, mathematics, English, modern foreign languages and humanities.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, a number of nominated senior and middle leaders, governors and pupils. Telephone meetings were held with the school's improvement partner and a representative of the Chiltern Learning Trust.
- Pupils' views were sought between classes, during lessons and at break and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, action-planning documents, minutes of meetings of the governing body, external evaluations, safeguarding records, information about pupils' attainment and progress, and school policies and procedures.
- Inspectors analysed 114 responses to Parent View, the online survey provided to parents by Ofsted, and 34 responses to staff questionnaires.
- Inspectors scrutinised the various forms of communication the school uses, including the website and information sent to and from parents and other stakeholders.

Inspection team

Kim Pigram, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Maher	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Webb	Her Majesty's Inspector

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