

# Link Secondary School

82–86 Croydon Road, Beddington, Croydon, Surrey CR0 4PD

## Inspection dates

16–17 November 2016

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Inadequate</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Inadequate</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Inadequate</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Inadequate</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an inadequate school

- Over time, leaders and governors have not secured improvements in the school's performance. Significant turbulence at senior leadership level since the last inspection has led to a decline in standards.
- The capacity of leaders to improve the school is weak. Currently, trustees and governors are relying on external consultants to run the school.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate because teachers do not have enough assessment information to inform their lesson planning. Consequently, pupils are not provided with work which extends their learning.
- Assessment systems are not fit for purpose. There is little information about the progress of groups of pupils over time. Leaders have not put systems in place to check the accuracy of any assessments that teachers make. Inspection evidence confirms that pupils make inadequate progress over time in English, mathematics and other subjects.
- The quality of 16 to 19 programmes is inadequate because the small group of students on these programmes are subject to the same weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment as others in the school.

### The school has the following strengths

- Pupils behave well. They enjoy their lessons because the curriculum content interests them. They are aware of each other's feelings and look after each other.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported through relevant activities interwoven through the curriculum.
- The work of external consultants, appointed in September 2016, has stabilised the school.
- Safeguarding is effective. Leaders report and record any concerns in a timely fashion. The school site is secure and staff are well trained in identifying any concerns.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are good. Therapists provide effective support to ensure that pupils' language and communication needs are met well.

## Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment for all groups of pupils, including those in the sixth form, by:
  - devising and implementing an effective assessment system which provides accurate information about pupils' attainment and progress in all curriculum areas
  - ensuring that teachers use this information to set challenging yet realistic targets
  - ensuring that teachers plan lessons which are precisely focused on what groups of pupils need to learn next.
- Improve outcomes for groups of pupils, including those in the sixth form, by:
  - analysing information about the progress different groups of pupils make, including those eligible for pupil premium, the most and least able, and boys and girls
  - implementing effective plans to address any differences in outcomes between groups of pupils.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that there is capacity in leadership at all levels to drive the school forward
  - developing the skills of emerging leaders so that they are increasingly able to take full responsibility in relevant areas of the school's work
  - ensuring that trustees and governors make sure that the very recent rate of improvement is sustained and secured.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Inadequate

- Significant instability in senior leadership since the last inspection due to changes in headship and various acting and interim arrangements has resulted in a decline in standards.
- Capacity for securing improvement is poor because governors are relying on the work of two external consultants commissioned to support the school. One consultant works full time as interim headteacher. Prior to these appointments in September 2016, improvements were too slow and pupils' outcomes were poor.
- Over time, leaders have not done enough to ensure that teaching and learning have improved because they did not put an effective assessment system in place. There are no procedures for checking the accuracy of teachers' assessments.
- There have been several changes to the way in which the curriculum is delivered. However, subjects studied are relevant and appropriate to the pupils on roll. Pupils study national curriculum subjects alongside social skills and therapy input. In recent weeks, leaders have reverted to a secondary model of curriculum delivery, with subject specialists teaching. This transition is still underway so it is too early to judge the effectiveness of the curriculum.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported well. For example, pupils learn how to access a range of community facilities such as a local gym; they learn about Greek myths and legends; and they participate in making decisions about the school environment and resources. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain because they learn what fundamental British values are and what they mean.
- Parents and staff recognise that there has been a significant shift in culture in the school since September 2016. The rate of improvement has accelerated. Consultants have worked successfully alongside the deputy headteacher to regain the confidence of parents. The school is back on track. However, it is too early to judge the impact of leaders' actions on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' outcomes. It is not clear how sustainable the recent improvements are because they are being driven by external consultants.
- Leaders have comprehensive plans for the small amount of pupil premium funding received by the school. These focus on the development of reading, but also include plans to support pupils' mathematical understanding, extend the use of technology and promote access to extra-curricular activities.
- Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

### Governance of the school

- Shortly after the last inspection, governors commissioned an external review of their work. They acted on the recommendations of the review, and as a result, governance has been strengthened. They have developed links with agencies that support the work of trustees and governors in schools. New governors have been recruited who have experience and skills that are relevant and appropriate to the context of the school.

However, these improvements have taken too long to implement. Some of the new governors, including the proposed new chair of the governing body, have not yet attended a meeting because their appointments are so recent.

- A second review of governance was held in June 2016, but this was less helpful because it did not involve key personnel such as the director of the charity which runs the school. It did, however, provide some useful advice that has been included in the current governors' action plan.
- Governors and trustees are committed to tackling weaknesses in the school. They attend training to improve their skills and knowledge. Consequently, they are able to ask relevant questions of leaders in meetings. They visit the school and report back to the governing body on their findings.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Three members of staff have recently been trained as designated safeguarding leads. The deputy headteacher takes overall responsibility for this area of the school's work, supported by an external consultant.
- Policies and practices have been recently reviewed by leaders and are in line with current legislation and guidance. Any issues that arise are recorded in detail and reported to the relevant agencies. Child protection records are kept securely. Systems have been improved to include notes of actions taken and related outcomes.
- Members of staff have received appropriate information and training. Parents consider their children to be safe in school. The school site is safe and secure.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Inadequate

- Assessment systems in the school are weak. There is no convincing system in place to measure the progress that pupils make in different subjects. Information available to inspectors was variable in quality and quantity. As a result, teachers do not have accurate information to use when planning lessons.
- Teachers plan lessons that interest pupils and secure their participation and attention. They think carefully about the individual pupils in their class when setting objectives, but are unable to set challenging targets that ensure pupils make strong progress. This is because they do not have reliable information about what pupils can do and what they need to learn next. Consequently, pupils' skills are not extended and they are not challenged to make strong progress. For example, work in mathematics books showed that in September 2015 pupils were learning to add numbers with two digits. In March 2016, they were practising counting to 20, and were still practising addition with two-digit numbers. This demonstrates that the pupils had not been moved on in their learning.
- Another result of weak assessment practice is that often teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are too low. Sometimes they are too high, and pupils cannot access the set task because they do not have the prerequisite skills to do so. For example, pupils were learning about capital cities and their relative distance from London. They were expected to measure the distances on a map and these were to be compared.

However, most of the group were unable to use a ruler accurately, so were unable to start to make comparisons.

- The contribution of additional adults to pupils' learning is variable. Where it is strong, adults ask questions that make pupils think or support pupils to maintain their focus on learning. At other times, additional adults have minimal impact on learning, as their engagement with pupils is superficial.
- Pupils were keen to read to inspectors because teachers choose appealing texts. Their self-esteem is boosted as adults praise them for their reading skills.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils' medical needs are well met because the school nurse, school staff and parents work together to make sure that staff are well trained and records remain up to date. Therapists make sure that pupils' speech and language needs and physical needs are met through regular assessment and review.
- There are few incidents of poor behaviour, and any that do occur are recorded and followed up appropriately. Bullying is rare. Pupils say that no one is ever unkind to another. They demonstrate this through their behaviour towards each other. Pupils are confident and self-assured. Parents spoken to during the inspection were confident that their children are well cared for.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite and courteous. They display excellent manners, for example holding doors open for adults. Pupils are respectful towards each other and adults.
- Pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school. They remain calm at breaktimes and lunchtimes because there are clear routines in place. During outdoor breaks, no one is isolated, because adults and pupils engage well with each other.
- Pupils participate well in lessons because the context is relevant and appropriate. Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive because they are interested in the content of lessons and have good relationships with members of staff.
- Most pupils attend well. The poor attendance of a very small number of pupils adversely affects the overall figure. Leaders follow up any absence rigorously. As a result, individual pupils improve their attendance over time.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Inadequate

- Pupils' outcomes are inadequate because too few make sufficient progress over time. Pupils join the school with low starting points as a result of their special educational needs and/or disabilities. They make inadequate progress and fall behind other pupils with similar ages and starting points.
- The school's information shows that in 2016 around a fifth of pupils in key stages 3 and 4 made expected progress in each of reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders could not provide any information about pupils' progress in science or humanities subjects. In addition, they were unable to provide any evidence of pupils' work in science during the 2015/16 year. The school's information suggests that pupils do better in art and design, with most pupils making expected progress. Inspection evidence gathered in lessons and through looking at pupils' work confirms that too few pupils made adequate progress during the 2015/16 year.
- Leaders could not provide evidence of how teachers' assessments of pupils' progress were checked for accuracy in 2015/16.
- At the end of key stage 4 and during the sixth form, some pupils achieve recognised qualifications. These include entry-level qualifications in English, mathematics, science, art, design technology, history and religious education. In 2016, a small number of pupils achieved GCSE grades in English, mathematics, science and art.
- Leaders were unable to provide information about the progress of different groups of pupils, such as those eligible for pupil premium, the most or least able, and boys or girls. They were able, however, to provide information about the progress of different year groups. Cohorts are small. Inspectors found no evidence of any one group performing differently to others in the school.
- In September 2016, all pupils were assessed in each curriculum subject, providing a secure baseline from which progress can be measured.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

## Inadequate

- Students in the small sixth form are subject to the same weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment as other classes in the school. Teachers do not have accurate assessment information to use when planning lessons. Therefore, lessons provide too little challenge, or are too difficult for students to understand.
- Information provided about outcomes for those in the sixth form was brief. This indicated that students in the sixth form had made little or no progress in English and mathematics between the end of key stage 4 and January 2016; some had regressed in their learning. The information showed that, between January 2016 and July 2016, some students started to make progress. It is not clear how leaders checked the accuracy of this information.
- Adults have high expectations with respect to students' behaviour and attitudes. As a result, students conduct themselves well, and demonstrate a growing emotional maturity.
- The curriculum is well thought out and tailored to the interests and aspirations of

individual students. For example, the sixth form tutor explained how a project to run a nail bar would interest each of the students in the group through nail art, advertising and logo design.

- Students receive appropriate information, advice and guidance to support a successful transition to college, employment or training. They participate in work-related learning and 'taster' days at the local college. As a result, they transition smoothly to courses that interest them.

## School details

Unique reference number	133742
Local authority	Sutton
Inspection number	10019673

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 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	36
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	5
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Acting chair	Daniel Quy
Interim headteacher	Don Blaylock
Telephone number	020 8688 7691
Website	<a href="http://thelinksecondaryschool.org.uk">thelinksecondaryschool.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@linksec.co.uk">admin@linksec.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	8–9 October 2014

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- There have been several changes of headteacher since the previous inspection. Currently, an external consultant has taken on the role of full-time interim headteacher, supported by a second consultant. The school is one of two run by the Link Day School Limited charity. Since the previous inspection, the governing body of this school has separated from that of the linked primary school. Trustees of the charity remain responsible for both schools, and there is trustee representation on the governing body.



- The school caters for pupils aged 11 to 19 who have speech, language and communication difficulties and/or autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan or a statement of educational needs. They are placed in the school by the local authority in which they reside.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school receives pupil premium funding for eligible pupils, but it does not receive Year 7 catch-up premium.

## Information about this inspection

- During the inspection, teaching and learning were observed in nine lessons. Most of these observations were carried out jointly with the interim headteacher or the deputy headteacher. Inspectors also looked at information about pupils' progress and scrutinised their books.
- Meetings were held with the two consultants working with the school, leaders and members of staff, a governor, parents and the director of the charity. They spoke to pupils around school and more formally with a group of pupils.
- The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the acting chair of the governing body. An inspector spoke to a parent by telephone.
- The 29 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. Ten of these responses were submitted during the inspection.
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including that relating to safeguarding, minutes of governing body meetings and logs of behavioural incidents.

## Inspection team

Gaynor Roberts, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sue Cox

Ofsted Inspector

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