

Education Links

90 Chandos Road, Stratford, London E15 1TT

Inspection dates

11–12 July 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders, including governors, are determined to make sure that pupils are given a second chance to succeed, both academically and personally.
- A strong and unified approach to school improvement, shared values and commitment by all staff provides the key driver for success.
- Pupils quickly settle into school and begin to make rapid gains in their personal development. Strong relationships and intensive support ensure that pupils feel safe and secure.
- The curriculum is personalised so that pupils re-engage quickly in their learning. Pupils study a broad range of subjects and take suitable qualifications appropriate to their needs and interests.
- Most pupils behave well and are motivated to do their best. There are some instances when pupils are not given the chance to work independently.
- All groups of pupils, whether they are on short-term or long-term placements, make good progress across all subjects.
- Partnership work with other professionals and parents is outstanding. The school provides support and guidance every step of the way for those parents who need additional help.
- The new system for setting targets, assessing pupils and tracking their progress enables leaders to spot any underachievement.
- However, leaders have yet to track separately the progress the more able and more able disadvantaged pupils make. This limits leaders' ability to evaluate the impact of their work incisively for these two groups.
- Interventions are highly tailored to support pupils' personal development and progress. Academic targets, however, secure good but not outstanding progress.
- Leadership for the quality of teaching and learning is excellent. It secures consistently good and strongly improving provision across the three sites. However, in some lessons, teachers do not pitch work at the right level of challenge, especially for the most able pupils.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that more teaching is outstanding to secure substantial progress, particularly for those pupils on long-term placements, by :
 - providing work in lessons which is always pitched at the right level of difficulty, especially for the most able pupils
 - giving those pupils who find learning difficult equipment to support their learning
 - setting aspirational targets for all groups of learners
 - checking the progress the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils make and comparing this to national expectations.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body are determined to make sure that pupils are well prepared for their next steps and for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders forge highly productive and positive relationships with pupils, parents, other schools and external agencies, including the police and school nurse. This enables leaders to continue to improve the quality of teaching and to provide excellent support for pupils' personal development and guidance for parents who need additional help.
- Senior leaders have responsibility and an overview of all three settings, including the effectiveness of placements, the quality of teaching, learning, assessment, the curriculum, pupil welfare and safety. As a result, equality of opportunity for all pupils is secured, irrespective of which site they attend.
- Work across all three sites is seamless, with regular team and tutor meetings. Teamwork is a real driver for improvement, where staff's input is encouraged and appreciated, resulting in high staff morale. Staff share leaders' high expectations.
- Leadership for the quality of teaching and learning is excellent. Staff are encouraged to reflect on their practice and to recognise strengths and areas for improvement with leaders and their colleagues. Teachers peer mentor each other. They check on the progress their colleagues make towards their targets. This open and honest culture breeds success. Indeed, the school is very successful in spotting potential talent and supporting those staff who wish to train to become teachers. As a result, the profile of teaching is improving strongly.
- Teachers are equally well supported by leaders to improve the quality of their practice, through coaching and through the appraisal cycle. Leaders know what constitutes effective practice and use this to guide teachers to continually strive for even better.
- Monitoring evidence provides leaders with an accurate picture of the school's performance, identifies the right priorities and informs improvement planning well.
- Pupils' strengths and weaknesses both academically and personally are assessed when they enter school. This enables leaders to implement strategies to boost pupils' achievement and to begin to close some significant gaps in their learning.
- A high proportion of pupils exceed the targets set, including in the core subjects. This demonstrates that pupils could achieve even more in order to make outstanding progress, especially those pupils on long-term placements.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and covers all subjects in the national curriculum. It is highly tailored to meet the needs, abilities and aptitudes of each pupil. When appropriate, pupils learn through individual education plans and timetables. Key literacy and numeracy skills are taught across a range of subjects. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is covered through a well-being programme, as well as life and social skills modules. There is a range of vocational and extra-curricular activities to deepen pupils' learning experience. Dependent on pupils' ability, courses studied range from functional skills to GCSEs.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Pupils

are respectful and tolerant to each other and adults. They are taught about differences, including those who have opposing views to themselves. British values are promoted effectively. Pupils learn about tolerance, respect and democracy, for example by voting for pupils they believe should be recognised for special awards, and they select specific rewards for them.

- The school only receives pupil premium funding directly for those pupils who are not dual-registered. This small amount of funding is used well to target interventions so that pupils begin to catch up in their learning, as well as supporting pupils emotionally and socially. Likewise, special educational needs funding is used well to provide intensive support to guide these pupils academically and personally.
- Pupils' progress is checked half-termly. This information is used to plan appropriate work and curriculum pathways, as well as to set targets for good progress. Leaders track most key groups' progress, but have yet to check separately the progress the most able pupils make, including disadvantaged more-able pupils. This prevents leaders from evaluating sharply how well these two groups achieve compared to other groups, or if strategies to boost achievement are as effective as they could be.

Governance of the school

- Governors and trustees are fully involved in the strategic direction of the school. They were pivotal in securing the change of status from an independent to a free school. This secured additional funding and has enabled the school to be more outward-looking. As a result, there are greater opportunities for staff to work in partnership with other schools, which has had a significant impact on the quality of teaching, through greater opportunities for professional development and sharing good practice. As a result, there is greater staffing stability, because staff feel better supported in their work.
- Trustees and governors are financially astute and use funds wisely. They know that all pupils achieve well, including those pupils eligible for the pupil premium. They provide the right level of support and challenge for leaders.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The designated safeguarding lead and deputies make sure that all the statutory requirements are met in full. Safeguarding meetings are held monthly to highlight and discuss any concerns raised by staff. Everyone is highly attuned to local community safeguarding concerns, as well as the needs, attitudes and behaviour of pupils. Training for staff and governors is up to date and covers all the school's statutory duties, including preventing radicalisation and child sexual exploitation. Staff and governors are fully aware of their collective responsibilities to keep pupils safe.
- All the required checks are undertaken to make sure that adults are suitable to work with children. As a result, this helps keep pupils safe and secure.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- All pupils learn well as a result of good and sometimes outstanding teaching, irrespective of which site they attend. Pupils are taught in their core group, where subject specialists teach across the three sites. This gives pupils a sense of belonging and security, thus reducing any anxiety they may have initially when they start school.
- Teachers and support staff know each pupil exceptionally well. Strong relationships are quickly established and pupils grow in confidence, begin to believe in their own abilities and start to achieve what they are capable of.
- Staff use every opportunity to celebrate pupils' achievements and effort through verbal praise, certificates and points that accrue financial rewards. Pupils celebrate each other's efforts, and spontaneously applaud their friends' work in lessons.
- Pupils learn in small teaching groups and often have one-to-one support in lessons and through specific targeted interventions, particularly to develop key literacy and numeracy skills. This benefits all groups, especially pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils on short-term placements. Most-able pupils have extra tuition after school, as well as additional homework that successfully deepens their learning.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan work that builds effectively on what pupils know and can do. This enables pupils to make links in their learning, to remain focused on their work and to acquire skills and knowledge at a good pace.
- Some pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, learn through a thematic approach that taps into their interests, promoting their motivation. They develop key skills in different subjects, such as reading recipes as well as counting and weighing in cookery topics.
- Nonetheless, pupils who find work hard are not always provided with suitable equipment to ensure that they achieve well. They are sometimes over-reliant on adult support. This slows their progress down and prevents them from becoming more independent.
- Drama is used well to develop pupils' communication and social skills. Pupils begin to empathise with others, to be respectful and tolerant. When appropriate, staff enrich pupils' learning through a host of visits and visitors, including annual residential trips, and specific events, such as digital days to develop media studies.
- Teachers meticulously plot what pupils have learned and use assessments to check on their progress. Increasingly, they encourage pupils to reflect on their learning and evaluate the work of their friends. This encourages pupils to accept criticism gracefully, and to learn from their mistakes.
- Some teachers use assessments well to plan work that builds on what pupils already know and can do. They check pupils' understanding in lessons through effective questioning, making sure that learning proceeds well. Nonetheless, there are times when activities lack sufficient challenge, including in reading and mathematics, and especially for the most able pupils.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Leaders, including governors and staff, put this at the very centre of their work, saying that this is a fresh start for pupils. They are determined that this is an opportunity for pupils to turn their lives around.
- A core group of staff, led by coordinators and supported well by learning mentors, have specific pastoral responsibility for pupils. Coordinators are the first point of contact for parents, thereby developing trust and effective communication channels, in order to help pupils settle into school and to pre-empt any potential issues. Inspection observations, including case studies and discussions with pupils, demonstrate how well the school helps pupils to begin to succeed academically and personally.
- The very nature of the provision means that pupils' needs and abilities, particularly those on short-term placements, have to be quickly assessed. These pupils have behavioural targets set by their mainstream schools. They make rapid gains in their behaviour, begin to appreciate the consequences of their actions and show remorse for previous incidents. Almost all pupils reintegrate back into mainstream schools successfully. The small proportion who do not usually stay on at this provision.
- Pupils who remain in school for 15 days or more, together with pupils on long-term placements, undertake a rigorous assessment that flags up strengths and weaknesses in key skills academically, socially and emotionally. Effective liaison with both parents and schools provides staff with vital information about the type and level of support pupils need. Staff's observations quickly recognise pupils' talents, resulting in bespoke support and opportunities for pupils to begin to thrive.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They learn about potential dangers in PSHE lessons, including radicalisation, gang and knife culture, sexual exploitation and risks associated with social media.
- Pupils appreciate that adults look out for them. Trust is at the centre of every relationship, which instils confidence that adults will protect them from danger.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff are adept at managing pupils' behaviour and quickly form strong bonds with pupils. They make sure that pupils understand the school's rules as well as the consequences of their actions if they choose not to adhere to the rules. This works, as the small number of exclusions made reduced by 50% over the year.
- When pupils find learning in lessons stressful and are unable to cope, learning mentors provide time for pupils to reflect on their behaviour and attitudes on a one-to-one basis. Those pupils who find it hard to control their emotions attend anger management workshops and receive counselling. Pupils begin to develop their own

coping strategies and inner control. School behaviour logs confirm that the number of behavioural incidents also declined throughout the year.

- Rewards are used astutely to modify and motivate pupils to want to succeed and to act responsibly and maturely. Pupils' conduct in lessons and around school is good. They take pride in their work and most present their work neatly.
- Pupils told inspectors that they are not worried about bullying in school because there are very few incidents. They know about all the different types of bullying, understand their collective responsibility to deal with it and trust adults to sort out any issues they have.
- Attendance for the vast majority of pupils improves from their typically low starting points. However, overall attendance, although improving, remains below that of other schools nationally. This is because a few pupils do not attend as regularly as they should. The school is working hard to address these issues.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Almost all pupils have significant gaps in their education as a result of a wide range of difficulties preventing them from attending mainstream education regularly. Consequently, their starting points are much lower than those typical for their age.
- New pupils join the school, often on a daily basis. It is evident that the longer pupils attend the provision, the more progress they make.
- All pupils achieve well given their different starting points. Current achievement information verifies that the proportion of pupils achieving their targets in all subjects is high. One in two pupils this year achieved at least one GCSE, with almost all pupils achieving some form of accreditation in functional skills, including in English and mathematics.
- Some Year 10 and Year 11 pupils undertake vocational qualifications, including BTEC level 1 in engineering. There are projects in films, mechanics, a photography project at the Olympic Park, as well as special bespoke projects for those pupils who are on short-term placements. All pupils have or are expected to achieve some form of accreditation, boosting their sense of achievement.
- Inspection observations and school achievement information confirm that pupils make good progress in reading and writing. Pupils read with confidence, fluency and enjoyment, on a one-to-one basis and in their class groups. Adults use every opportunity to enable pupils to practise key skills in both literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. Pupils also make good progress in the foundation subjects, including art and drama.
- Achievement information shows that there is little variation between the progress different groups make, including those pupils eligible for the pupil premium, those who have special educational needs or disabilities, the more vulnerable and the most able pupils. All make similarly good progress.
- Skills for life modules include careers guidance and advice, as well as culminating in a BTEC level 1 accreditation. Innovative approaches, such as virtual reality headsets, enable pupils to experience a range of possible careers, including archaeology. Guest

speakers and outreach projects, including at the House of Commons, provide invaluable opportunities for pupils to develop their debating skills. Work experience with the local church to help the homeless enables pupils to help others, all of which inspires pupils to begin to choose what their best option would be for the future.

- As a result, almost all pupils in the current Year 11 have gained college places or apprenticeships. They are well prepared for their next stage of education because the school is exceptionally effective in making sure that pupils experience academic success and rapid improvements in their personal development.

School details

Unique reference number	141139
Local authority	Newham
Inspection number	10031698

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

Type of school	Secondary alternative provision
School category	Free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	52
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Radhika Bynon
Principal	Sandy Davies
Telephone number	0208 555 0850
Website	www.education-links.org
Email address	office@education-links.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This is the school's first standard inspection since becoming a free school in September 2014, having previously been an independent special school.
- The school is a stand-alone provision of the Community Links Academy Trust. It consists of three main sites located within the borough. The principal and the governing body oversee the work of all three sites.
- The Stratford site provides long-term placements for key stage 4 pupils who predominately access GCSE pathways. The East Ham site provision is for short-term placements of up to 30 days, mainly for key stage 3 pupils. The Plaistow site is much smaller and provides for higher-needs pupils, including pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school is funded for 80 pupils and provides full-time education for pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion, for a wide range of reasons, on either a short-term or long-term basis. At the time of the inspection, four out of five pupils were dual-

registered, two out of three pupils were on long-term placements, with the remainder on short-term placements. Throughout the year, pupil numbers fluctuate significantly, particularly in relation to pupils on short-term placements. Throughout this academic year, 150 short-term placements were allocated.

- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding is above average. The number of pupils who have a statutory statement of special educational needs and/or an education, health and care plan is also above average.
- Pupils are from a wide range of ethnic groups, including Asian, Eastern European, White British, African and Caribbean heritages. A small proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- Pupil premium funding is only delegated to the school for those pupils who are single-registered. Catch-up funding is not received.
- The school meets the requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what free schools should publish.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons in most classes and observed a variety of activities across the three sites. Leaders accompanied inspectors on most of the visits to lessons.
- Pupils' behaviour during lessons and around the school was observed. Inspectors also scrutinised the school's records of behavioural incidents, including bullying logs.
- Inspectors spoke informally to pupils about their learning in lessons and met with a group of pupils. Inspectors observed pupils reading in lessons and listened to individual pupils read.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders to evaluate the impact of their work to improve pupils' outcomes and strengthen the quality of teaching. This included meetings with the curriculum leads, safeguarding designated lead and a deputy, and the leader for personal development, behaviour and safety.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. Two of these governors are also trustees.
- Inspectors reviewed the work in pupils' books to check progress and attainment over time. They scrutinised the school's current assessment information on how well pupils achieve and examined leaders' monitoring records.
- A range of documentation related to safeguarding was scrutinised. This included the single central record of pre-employment checks and records relating to the school's work to safeguard pupils at risk of harm.
- There were no parental responses to Ofsted's online survey, or staff and pupil questionnaires. Inspectors scrutinised the school's most recent surveys of parents and pupils.

Inspection team

Mary Hinds, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mary Geddes

Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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