

Inspection of Linden Bridge School

Grafton Road, Worcester Park, Surrey KT4 7JW

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 November 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy their time at Linden Bridge because the school makes them feel welcome, valued and proud. Pupils appreciate the patient and kind approach that staff take. This helps pupils' own personalities to shine through. Conversation and laughter abound because pupils know that staff genuinely wish to hear from them. Pupils delight in this and show great joy when they speak to staff.

Pupils are equally kind and encouraging towards each other. They are accepting of each other's strengths and difficulties and enjoy seeing their peers achieve. There is a genuine community feel in the school, with pupils moving between classes to support and play with their older and younger friends. Pupils feel safe and show kindness. They rarely fall out and the first signs of bullying are quickly addressed by staff.

Pupils enjoy learning and appreciate the opportunity to broaden their interests. They are hopeful for the future because staff help them consider, plan and take their next steps into adulthood. However, the curriculum has been weak for some time, which means that, too often, pupils do not build on their prior knowledge. In particular, weaknesses in phonics provision hamper pupils' efforts to read as well as they need to.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The curriculum in most subjects is not fully outlined in plans or understood by staff. While a suitable range of subjects is covered, too often individual staff decide what pupils will learn and when. This means that pupils do not consistently build on their prior knowledge. The new multi-academy trust, appointed in March, has quickly identified this and put in place appropriate actions to address this with urgency. Recent planning is more sharply focused on the content pupils need to learn. However, this work is at an early stage and has yet to have the impact that leaders intend.

Staff have not been trained to deliver the curriculum. They often choose their own methods in the absence of an agreed approach set out by leaders. Plans do not outline precisely which knowledge pupils have to secure before moving on to their next steps. This means that staff have to formulate their own assessments, which do not focus on the key knowledge pupils need.

There are some subjects which have a more established curriculum. For example, in art and physical education (PE), specialist staff plan and deliver the curriculum. Because these members of staff oversee all of the teaching, the methods for teaching are consistent and pupils do build an impressive body of knowledge. However, as with other subjects, planning does not span the early years and sixth-form phases of the school. This means that younger children are not sufficiently

prepared for the key stage 1 curriculum, and the oldest students do not build on their prior knowledge.

Many pupils in the school are capable of reading and have some simple phonics knowledge. However, staff do not use an agreed scheme or approach to teach pupils the basics of reading. Staff, too often, guide pupils to refer to pictures or recognise whole words, rather than breaking down words into smaller sounds as they are meant to. This prevents pupils from making the progress of which they are capable.

Pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified accurately when they join the school. Staff work with colleagues, families and pupils to gain an understanding of pupils needs and to set targets. These targets are broken down by skilled staff who help pupils to improve their communication, relationships and physical development well. Staff track pupils' progress precisely and adapt their support when needed.

Pupils enjoy the range of activities they can take part in. Younger children love to explore the forest area. This environment changes daily and provides them with a safe space to develop their balance, strength and coordination. Visits and trips to shops and cafes help pupils to interact with unfamiliar adults and settings. Older students enjoy the comprehensive work experience and the chance to visit apprenticeship providers and colleges. The work to support students' next steps into further education, employment and training is a strength of the school.

Pupils throughout the school behave well in class and during free time. Reception children are taught to follow and value the daily routines. These children settle quickly because of the predictable environment and demeanour of staff. Older pupils enjoy the greater responsibility they are afforded. For example, students in the sixth form keep their common room spotless and enjoy the chance to coach younger pupils in sports and games.

The new multi-academy trust has been a breath of fresh air to the school. While staff workload has temporarily increased, staff recognise this is part of their journey to improvement. They value the approach of the trust and their raised expectations for what pupils can achieve. New governance and monitoring arrangements mean that changes are now monitored more carefully to ensure that standards improve.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are vetted and trained in the school's procedures before they begin working with pupils. Often, pupils are unable to communicate their needs through speech. Staff notice the small changes in pupils' behaviour and record these for leaders to review. Leaders use this information sensitively, working with external agencies and families to ensure that pupils are kept safe from harm.

Pupils learn to manage risks and stay safe. Younger children learn to communicate their needs through signs and pictures. Pupils learn to use equipment and computers safely. Older students develop and follow appropriate risk assessments as they begin their work placements.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The content of the curriculum in most subjects has not been set out clearly for all year groups. This means that, too often, staff decide in isolation what to teach and when. Leaders must set out clearly what content is taught and in what order from Reception to sixth form.
- Staff have not received sufficient direction in how to teach and assess pupils in a range of subjects. This means that staff use methods of their own choosing, which can be inefficient or confusing for pupils. Leaders must ensure that staff receive appropriate training and support to deliver and assess the curriculum using the agreed approaches.
- The school does not currently follow a systematic synthetic phonics programme. Staff use a range of resources and techniques which are not well matched to pupils' needs. Leaders must ensure that:
 - a single phonics programme, with appropriate planning and resources, is used to teach early reading in the school
 - staff in all key stages receive appropriate training to deliver this programme
 - staff deliver the programme as instructed, and that pupils make the progress of which they are capable.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 144233 |
| Local authority | Surrey |
| Inspection number | 10203142 |
| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Academy special |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 147 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 18 |
| Appropriate authority | Governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Theresa Ricketts |
| Executive principal | Vanessa Wallden |
| Website | www.linden-bridge.surrey.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- Linden Bridge is a special school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder and complex social and communication needs. All of the pupils at the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The school operates a residential care facility with 16 places. Pupils typically attend this facility for two nights per week.
- In March 2021, the school joined the Howard Partnership Trust, a multi-academy trust, having formerly been part of the LIFT Partnership multi-academy trust from September 2017.
- Ofsted previously judged Linden Bridge School to be outstanding in 2013, before it opened as an academy. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- The inspectors met with senior leaders and two governors, including the chair. Inspectors also met with representatives from the multi-academy trust, including the chief executive officer.
- The inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, art and PE. They talked to subject leaders, staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work. They then considered a wider range of evidence.
- The inspectors reviewed the arrangements for safeguarding by scrutinising safeguarding records, interviewing staff and through discussions with pupils.
- The inspection team considered the views of parents shared through the Ofsted surveys. They gathered the views of pupils and staff through surveys, interviews and discussions conducted throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Daniel Lambert, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Hilary Goddard

Ofsted Inspector

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