

Inspection of The Link Academy

Simms Lane, Netherton, Dudley, West Midlands DY2 0PB

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 February 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Previous inspection grade Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

The Link Academy has high expectations for everyone. The school's values of dreaming big, rewarding effort, leading together, respecting each other and our world, and learning that inspires, run through all aspects of school life. Pupils and staff say that the school has improved considerably. Inspection evidence supports this.

Pupils behave in a calm and orderly way around school and in lessons. Leaders have established strong routines for behaviour. If behaviour falls below what is expected, staff respond quickly to resolve the issue.

Pupils are looked after very well and feel safe. The pastoral team is highly skilled in helping all pupils. If bullying happens, pupils know that they have someone they can talk to. During periods of COVID-19 restrictions, staff kept in regular touch with pupils. This enabled them to continue to look after pupils' well-being and learning.

Leaders have created a well-designed curriculum. They have also appointed the right staff and trained them effectively. Teachers ensure that pupils develop their knowledge and understanding in all subjects well.

The school offers a range of clubs and activities, such as a planned skating trip, which pupils are eagerly looking forward to.

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

The school is very well led. The headteacher's principled leadership has brought the staff together as a cohesive team. Everyone works in the best interests of the pupils. High ambitions are seen in all aspects of school life and senior leaders do not allow social disadvantage to be a barrier to success. Leaders and staff benefit from the support provided by the multi-academy trust.

The curriculum is ambitious. Pupils study all the national curriculum subjects in key stage 3. In key stage 4, pupils choose from a broad range of options. Leaders have ambitions to increase numbers who study French. Curriculum plans identify the most important things that pupils need to know and remember. These are sequenced in a way so that pupils can use what they have learned to help them tackle more complex ideas. All subjects help develop pupils' literacy skills and vocabulary range.

Teachers generally have strong subject knowledge and deliver the curriculum very well. Where that is not the case, teachers receive regular training on how to improve their practice. They regularly check pupils' understanding and use what they find out to shape the direction of the next steps in learning.

Pupils produce work of a high standard. Written work is well presented. For example, in design technology, the quality of practical work produced by Year 11 pupils is extremely high. The pupils are deservedly very proud of their work.

Leaders have high ambitions for all pupils. High-quality teaching helps all pupils learn well. Teachers use the new pupil passports in Years 7 and 11 to plan for the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Subject-specific strategies have been added to information provided for staff in mathematics and to a lesser extent in English. However, pupils' needs in other subjects are not always met as effectively. Teaching assistants support pupils well. All staff receive appropriate information and training to support pupils with SEND with their learning.

The school understands that the teaching of phonics and reading is fundamental to the progress of all pupils. They are implementing a new strategy so that all pupils become fluent readers.

Pupils access a wide and rich set of experiences. They learn about life in modern Britain, underpinned by the school's five values. Pupils lead working parties focusing on, for example, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender or anti-racism issues. They have an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships. However, pupils say that they want more time for personal, social and health education.

Pupils access high-quality careers advice and guidance. There are plans to utilise the academy trust's strong links with local industry and businesses to enhance this provision further.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils feel safe in school. Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding across the whole school. The safeguarding team identifies issues quickly and takes appropriate action. Staff receive regular training on safeguarding. They are clear about what to do if they have a concern about a child. The school has on-site support for pupils, including help for issues relating to mental health. Leaders are aware of their most vulnerable pupils and check on them regularly.

Records are detailed and well organised. Leaders make appropriate checks on those staff who join or visit the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Although leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate information about individual pupils with SEND, the information is not specific in all subjects as it is, for example, in mathematics. This affects how well these pupils learn in some subjects. Leaders should ensure that pupil passports detail the necessary subject-specific strategies across the whole curriculum.
- The curriculum for personal development is not always taught well. Pupils' deeper knowledge in some topics is not fully developed, especially in key stage 4.

Leaders should develop teachers' specialist knowledge to deliver the curriculum and evaluate how the depth of pupils' knowledge is affected by curriculum time.

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

Unique reference number	144952
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	10212194
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	938
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Lowell Williams
Principal	Emma Edwards-Morgan
Website	www.thelinkacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined the Dudley Academies Trust on 1 September 2017.
- The school uses five alternative providers. Four are registered in Dudley and one is registered in Sandwell.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships. The requirements of the Gatsby Benchmarks are met.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the principal, two vice-principals, four assistant principals and one associate senior leader, as well as subject leaders and teachers. They met

with the chief executive officer, two members of the trust board and one member of the local advisory committee.

- As part of this inspection, inspectors paid particular attention to mathematics, science, geography and design technology. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in English.
- Inspectors scrutinised several documents, including those related to safeguarding and child protection. They checked that the single central record contained all required information.

Inspection team

Nicola Walters, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Byatt	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah Steer	Ofsted Inspector
Gwen Onyon	Ofsted Inspector

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