

Inspection of Links Hatfield Academy

Travellers Lane, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 8TJ

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 March 2024

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

The head of school is Ben Rice. This school is part of Links Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, David Allen, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Maire Lynch.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils who attend regularly do well and make good progress with their learning. The school is aspirational for what pupils can achieve. It offers a full academic curriculum. This is enhanced by specialist facilities, for example for design technology and sports.

Many pupils want to come to school for the first time in some years. Pupils are highly complimentary about the school, saying that it 'goes above and beyond', helping them in their home lives as well as at school. Parents say the same, noting how the school is flexible and meets the needs of their children. These opinions demonstrate how positive relationships are between pupils and the staff.

Pupils know and appreciate that school keeps them safe. Pupils are taught about issues such as consent and avoiding gang and knife crime. Pupils are reflective about these matters and produce work, such as art and raps, expressing their feelings. The school works closely with external agencies to get pupils the help they need when they have difficulties in their lives. If pupils are rude or aggressive, the school deals with this appropriately, making sure the rest of the school is not disrupted. As a result, the school is a calm and happy place, supporting pupils to be ready to learn.

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

The school has a well-designed and flexible curriculum. This means that it can adapt learning as needed for individual pupils and classes. However, the school is still clear as to the best order in which pupils need to be taught key knowledge. Pupils work towards appropriate and valuable qualifications, including GCSEs.

When pupils attend regularly, they achieve well and fill gaps in their learning quickly. Some subjects are taught particularly well. This is reflected in the enthusiasm of pupils and the quality of their work. The school is aware that there are a very few subjects that are not taught as well. It has taken action to improve these by training staff and building links with subject experts. However, these changes are too recent to have yet had an impact.

Pupils who join the school with weaker reading skills receive support to help them catch up. All lessons encourage pupils to rehearse reading so they develop fluency. However, there is not yet enough emphasis on pupils reading for pleasure or interest. This limits how well pupils develop a love of books and an understanding of the world around them.

All pupils have social, emotional and/or mental health needs. Some pupils also have additional special educational needs and/or disabilities. Comprehensive assessments ensure staff are well supported in how to help these pupils engage in, and progress with, learning.

Pupils mix well at breaktimes, chatting and playing football. The school ensures that plenty of healthy food is available to pupils. The size of the outside space limits playing large-scale games. The school has put in place provision of fitness equipment to counter this. Pupils have friendly rivalry with a regularly contested gym leaderboard.

The school teaches pupils about being good citizens in modern Britain. It emphasises topics relating to keeping safe and healthy. It is a welcoming and inclusive community. The school ensures that pupils understand what options are open to them when they leave.

Many pupils have challenges in their lives outside school. This means that for some, coming to school regularly is hard. The school works closely with families to build relationships and encourage pupils to attend. For many, this results in strong attendance. However, attendance for others remains stubbornly low. The school's strategies to engage some families have not yet worked.

Some pupils have lower attendance because of suspensions. These are used as a last resort for extreme behaviours. Suspensions have fallen since last year, but some pupils are still missing out on too much education.

Behaviour is generally calm. Where pupils do present more challenging behaviour, staff manage it well to avoid disturbing the rest of the pupils. Pupils understand expectations, and most meet these.

The school is well led and managed. Staff feel supported and work closely together. The school is supported and challenged to continue to raise aspirations and attendance by a strong trustee board.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school does not yet have a strong culture of reading. Pupils read in lessons, but not for interest or pleasure. This hinders their appreciation of books and further knowledge of the world around them. The school needs to find ways to engage pupils in reading more widely and often to broaden their horizons.
- Attendance for some pupils is too low. Pupils miss out on learning when they are not attending school. The school needs to consider further strategies to support the attendance of pupils who are frequently absent so that they benefit from the good quality of education that the school provides.

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.

Further information

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

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	147451
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10295118
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Academy alternative provision sponsored
Age range of pupils	13 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	46
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Maire Lynch
CEO of the trust	David Allen
Headteacher	Ben Rice (Head of School)
Website	linksacademyhatfield.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened in September 2019. The predecessor school, Park Education Support Centre, had been judged inadequate at its last inspection in January 2018.
- The school moved to its current premises in January 2020.
- The school is part of the Links Academy Trust, which it joined in September 2019.
- Pupils arrive on roll at different points in the year, having been permanently excluded or on the brink of being so, from mainstream schools. The school either works with their families to identify an appropriate next school or provides a longer term education until the end of key stage 4.
- The school is registered to take pupils from age 11 to 16.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- Approximately half of pupils are dual rolled with another school.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school 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 head of school and chief executive officer. They met with other school leaders. They met with several of the trustees and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, and art and design. For each subject, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke with teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors visited a wide range of other lessons in other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey.

Inspection team

Tessa Holledge, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Mary Abeyasekera

Ofsted Inspector

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