

Link Secondary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133742
Local Authority	Sutton
Inspection number	328745
Inspection date	12 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	48
Sixth form	8
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Gabrielle Gray
Headteacher	Mr Joe Pearson
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2005
School address	82–86 Croydon Road Beddington Croydon CR0 4PD
Telephone number	020 8688 7691
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Link Secondary School is a non-maintained special school, one of two that are run by Link Day School Limited, a registered charity. Since the last inspection, the school has expanded to include a sixth form class. The school provides education for students who have speech, language and social communication difficulties and other learning difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorder and emotional difficulties. The school has recently achieved 'Healthy Schools Status' and also the 'Sustainable Travel' award for promoting sustainable forms of transport.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Link Secondary is a good school that successfully demonstrates its ethos of ensuring students achieve their potential academically and in relation to their personal development. Students enter with attainment that is exceptionally low. They make good progress although standards when they leave are still well below average. The quality of teaching is good and benefits from the support of the team of speech and language therapists based at the school.

Lessons are well planned and, typically, they are characterised by brisk pace with many opportunities for practical experience. Good account has been taken of national guidance about the format of lessons and encouraging students to assess their own work and that of peers. These features along with regular assessments make for good quality education. Occasionally, learning objectives are insufficiently clear and opportunities to make the most of students' prior learning are missed.

Teaching assistants, some of whom have advanced skills, make a significant contribution to the students' learning and achievement. The vast majority of students meet their challenging targets and where they do not, the school takes necessary action, such as additional support for learning. The students enjoy coming to school. Parents are very happy for their children to attend, knowing they will be very safe, that they greatly enjoy their lessons and that the school keeps parents well informed.

The school's monitoring and tracking of achievement is good and much improved since the last inspection. The curriculum is also improved, notably the provision for students over 16 years of age which is a new development for the school. New opportunities for accreditation have been created although currently some of these are only available in the sixth form. The curriculum is good and enriched by access to mainstream settings, a good range of lunchtime activities, a local youth club and a residential experience.

All the students make outstanding progress in their personal development due to the well-integrated provision of PSHCE (personal, social, health and citizenship education), support and guidance. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. The students are very proud of their school, evidenced by strong excellent relationships at all levels, good behaviour and attendance. Absences are invariably due to medical reasons.

The overall quality of care, guidance and support provided is excellent. School procedures, including child protection, ensure their well-being is appropriately safeguarded. Transition planning is effective in preparing them for moving from one stage to the next. Students receive an appropriate level of therapy according to need to improve their access to the curriculum and overall independence.

The quality of leadership and management is good. Most subject leaders make good use of data relating to students' progress. This gives them an accurate view of their department's effectiveness. Given its track record, the school's capacity for further improvement is also good.

The governing body gives good support on personnel, student welfare, premises and finance issues although their role in challenging the school about students' achievements is less strong.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The students' personal development is outstanding due to the continuing excellent support they receive and the good curriculum that provides new opportunities during their transition from school to further education. Good teaching results in students making good academic progress in relation to their individual targets and accredited courses. For some students, courses are accessed at local colleges of further education, other accreditation is achieved at Entry Level and through Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) modules. In common with the school, the sixth form has well developed links with local schools and colleges and all are well prepared for their next stage of education. Staffing changes usefully include the recent appointment of a teacher with responsibility for developing the post-16 provision. The overall management is provided by the same staff as the main school and is similarly good. Recent improvements include widening links with colleges of further education and more opportunities for accredited learning such as adult tests in literacy and numeracy (ALAN awards).

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure all learning objectives in lesson plans are precise.
- Increase the involvement of all subject leaders and the governing body in whole-school self-evaluation, particularly in relation to evaluating students' progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

There is a wide range of ability within the whole school. On entry to the school, some students in Year 7 are working at pre-National Curriculum levels, (p-levels) and some are working above these levels. Nevertheless, in relation to their starting points, the students' achievements are good. They also make good progress in meeting targets in their individual education plans. At the end of Key Stage 4, students attain nationally accredited qualifications, including GCSE English, mathematics, science and art. Where appropriate Entry Level and ASDAN awards are also successfully taken.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The students' outstanding progress in their personal development reflects the school's positive ethos and strong commitment to providing a safe, well-supported environment where students can enjoy their learning. They respond very enthusiastically to the emphasis on healthy lifestyles including the importance and enjoyment of physical activity. Several are involved in a sustainable transport project where they and staff are encouraged to cycle to school. Students make an excellent contribution to the community. Older students enjoying planning mini-enterprises to raise funds for the school and all students raise funds for charities at home and abroad. The oldest students gain valuable life-skills through work experience and attendance at colleges of further education. Through the PSHCE curriculum, all students learn about harmful substances and the importance of healthy relationships. They readily acknowledge that they can talk to trusted adults whenever they have problems. Consequently, they feel very safe in school.

The school council includes all students and they recognise they have a voice in school affairs, for example, improvements in access to drinking water and more play equipment. Within the

school, students show respect for peers, adults and the fabric of the building. Their behaviour is good as is their attendance. In the playground, friendships are evident and many choose to play in team games or opt for organised lunchtime clubs. Students report that they feel free from bullying or unpleasantness and that they really look forward to coming to school. Parents unanimously endorse this view. Visits to the community, including a residential school journey to Dorset, greatly assist the students' confidence and independence skills. At a recent county sports competition, the students were given an award for their sportsmanship.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers know their students very well and this enables them to plan appropriate lessons. Typically, lessons have a brisk pace with extensive opportunities for practical experience, for example, using mathematical equipment or creating posters of favourite TV shows using a computer program. Teachers, teaching assistants and therapists give a suitably high priority to the development of communication skills. Considerable thought is given to teaching different abilities in the same class and the school achieves considerable success in this. For example, in English, the teacher gives good guidance for students entering different examinations but both studying Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Digital cameras are also used well to record students' work, although sometimes opportunities are missed to further develop students' skills. For example, students cut and paste from catalogues to create a display instead of using real images that they had previously captured. Relationships are very strong between students and all staff. Teaching assistants are well deployed and help teachers by recording small steps in progress. Increasingly there are good examples of students assessing their own work and that of their peers. The use of learning objectives in lessons is usually good. However, on occasions, the objectives state what the teacher is going to do rather than what the students are going to learn.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is relevant to the students' needs and enables them to make good progress academically and in their personal development. Individual learning plans are carefully designed to tailor lessons to individual needs. All students have equal access to learning because relevant experiences and support are provided where necessary. Programmes for Year 11 and post-16 students usefully include work-related learning. Currently work experience is not offered in Year 10, although the school is considering some students who may benefit from such activities. The good provision for PHSCE underpins much of the school's work and has a significant impact on all students' personal development. Relevant themes are addressed in all years, although careers education is underemphasised and often not reported. The curriculum provides few opportunities for students to express choice, for example, they cannot choose any subjects or activities. There are also some recently introduced accredited courses for sixth form students that would be suitable for younger students. In addition to the National Curriculum, a good range of imaginative enrichment activities is provided. For example, competitive sports, regular visits to the community, local schools and colleges and residential experiences ensure all students are well provided for irrespective of need.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school is successful in its aim to provide a well-integrated provision of education and therapy that enables students to improve academically as well as becoming as independent as possible. Speech and language therapy, in particular, significantly helps students to access the curriculum. The input of speech and language therapy is well managed to ensure time out of lessons is minimised. Relationships with other agencies are very effective and some departments, for example, English, work very closely together when planning lessons and training.

There is also excellent provision for the students' emotional needs, including regular access to a highly qualified counsellor. Significant preparation is undertaken to ensure smooth transition between classes and when leaving school for further education. Students have good access to the Connexions advisor to help with these plans. Careers education and guidance does not appear on timetables nor is it effectively reported. Annual reviews of statements of special educational needs keep parents well informed. Academic support and guidance is good. Academic reports written by the school are detailed although some progress reports from college are not of the same quality.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive, comments included, 'I really appreciate the efforts made to enable my son to travel independently...it's great to see our son blossom...it's such a caring school where all are valued.' A small minority would wish to see greater use of the home-school diary.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher continues to provide good leadership and has a clear vision for the school's development. He is ably supported by the deputy headteacher who provides a good example for class teachers. The headteacher has ensured that the use of students' progress data is much improved since the last inspection. It is also well used by most subject leaders to track progress in English, mathematics and science. For example, monitoring and evaluation of students' test results in mathematics led to increased support and changes in the curriculum to raise achievement.

Improvement since the last inspection has also been good on several other fronts. For example, the school grounds are much more suitable for leisure and curriculum activity. The newly established post-16 provision offers suitable programmes and new accreditation in literacy and numeracy. Firm plans exist for further substantial improvement to the school's premises.

Professional development is given a high priority and excellent use is made of the therapist's expertise. This includes a rigorous programme of training to specifically enhance teachers' knowledge and understanding of communication for secondary students. Relationships with other agencies are well managed and all partners make good use of the school's expertise in their specialist field. Financial matters are well managed and appropriately audited.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

25 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Link Secondary School, Croydon, CR0 4PD

Thank you for helping me get to know your school this week and for giving me such a warm welcome. I am pleased to say that you go to a good school! The quality of teaching and your lessons are all good and the other support you receive including speech and language therapy all help to enable you to make good progress and achieve as well as you do.

The headteacher leads the staff very well and they all work hard for you. The teachers and teaching assistants make sure that your lessons help you to learn in lots of different ways, although you could be offered a bit more choice as to when you do some lessons.

You are helped to become more independent, such as the travel programme and making your own breakfasts. I really enjoyed meeting a small group of you and was most impressed by your confidence. You get on well with the staff and your behaviour is good in lessons and at breaks. I could see you were happy when you arrived at school and were tired when it was home time.

You have a wide range of things to do and I know you like all the clubs and trips you go on. You have lots of lessons, including swimming, games and horse-riding to keep you strong, fit and healthy. Your school meals are made to be healthy and it's clear they are tasty too! I do agree that for some of you older students, the portions are a bit small. You obviously enjoy your lessons, especially using computers! The links that you have with other schools and colleges, are really effective in giving you the opportunity to mix with other young people and take even more exams. The new sixth form is a very useful addition to the school.

In order to improve the school even more, I'm asking the headteacher to do a couple of things. One is to make sure that teachers are very clear about what they want you learn in lessons. I'm also asking all teachers and governors to be more closely involved in checking just how well you do.

Good luck!

Yours sincerely,

Greg Sorrell

Lead Inspector