

New Line Learning Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135372
Local Authority	NA
Inspection number	345499
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Linda McGill HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	667
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ray Harris
Headteacher	Dr Chris Gerry (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspection team observed 32 parts of lessons taught by 32 different teachers and visited a number of classrooms for shorter periods to look at students' books and folders. Meetings were held with the Executive Principal, the Chair of the Governing Body and with other members of staff and groups of students. The team observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents including information about students' progress and other statistical information, the academy's plan for improvement and departmental reviews and evaluations. In addition, the questionnaires returned by 36 parents and carers, 85 students and 58 members of staff were examined.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- whether progress is accelerating and attainment improving in all year groups
- the effectiveness of the academy's steps to improve students' basic skills
- the sustainability of improvements in attendance
- whether the teaching is of sufficiently good quality to sustain the rapid improvements needed in students' progress.

Information about the school

New Line Learning Academy is one of two academies run by the New Line Learning Academies' Trust. New Line Learning and Cornwallis Academies share a governing body and an Executive Principal, but each is led on a day-to-day basis by a head of school. The academy has specialisms in business and enterprise and in vocational studies. The construction of a new building is well under way and it is anticipated that it will open in September this year.

The academy accepts students of all abilities although it operates in a selective area. It is smaller than the average secondary school. Most of the students are of White British heritage, with a small number from a range of minority ethnic groups. Some of these students are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students known to be eligible for a free school meal is double the national average and over half have special educational needs or a disability. Students' difficulties mainly relate to their learning or behaviour. The academy's roll includes a small number of looked after children.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

New Line Learning Academy is rapidly improving the outcomes for its students. Staff at all levels share a strong commitment to helping the students overcome the barriers to learning that many of them face. They seek imaginative solutions to what have been long-standing problems. They give a high degree of attention to identifying and meeting the academic and personal needs of individual students. This personalised approach, together with an innovative and engaging curriculum and teaching that is securely satisfactory, means that students in all year groups are making good progress in their learning. Challenging targets have been met, exceeded and revised upwards. Although attainment remains low, the students are closing the gap on their counterparts nationally. Their achievement is satisfactory.

When they started their secondary education, fewer than half of the students had reached the levels expected of eleven-year-olds in reading, writing and mathematics. Over time, this lack of success and students' low basic skills adversely affected their attitudes to learning, their self-esteem, behaviour and attendance. The academy's staff have made concerted efforts to counter these hindrances to learning, with a good deal of success. An emphasis on boosting literacy skills, for example, has led to significant gains in students' reading ages, although there are still occasions where gaps in students' basic skills slow their learning. The rate of attendance has improved dramatically and is approaching the national average, although it is still too low. The number of students who are persistently absent has reduced considerably. Students generally behave acceptably in lessons and around the academy because they know what is expected of them. They are beginning to take responsibility for themselves and to support one another. Students are increasingly ready to learn. They respond with genuine enjoyment and enthusiasm in lessons that are challenging, well-paced and which require them to be active rather than passive learners. Students are now better prepared for the next stage of their education and the world of work; there has been a substantial increase in numbers transferring to the sixth form at Cornwallis academy. The curriculum appropriately reflects the academy's specialisms, but the specialist areas have yet to show an impact in driving improvements across the whole academy.

In the best lessons, teachers know exactly what they want students to learn. They are assiduous in checking, throughout the course of the lesson, that the students are on track and understand what they are learning, and they know precisely when to move students on to the next level. However, not all teaching is of this quality. In some lessons where teaching is less effective, students' progress slows, their concentration slips and their motivation drifts.

The Executive Principal provides a clear, overarching vision for the work of the Trust and

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its academies. Efforts to involve staff at all levels in decision-making have been successful. Staff say that they are proud to work for the academy and they share a commitment to making a positive difference to the life chances of young people in the local area. They have many ideas for future developments. Plans for improvement show that a great deal is being tackled on a number of fronts. However, the plans lack detail and a sharp focus on the key areas that will drive improvement even more quickly. The academy evaluates its performance in a number of ways, both internally and by employing external consultants, with the result that areas of strength and weakness are well known. Actions taken so far have had a striking impact in some areas such as attendance, and a good impact on accelerating students' progress. This confirms that there is a good capacity to sustain further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strive to ensure that all teaching is at least good in order to accelerate progress still further by:
 - making the most of every opportunity to promote students' skills in speaking, listening, reading, writing and mathematics in all subjects
 - ensuring that teachers make absolutely clear to students what they are to learn in lessons, and check rigorously that they are on track throughout the lesson
 - providing more opportunities for students to engage in active, participative learning.
- Ensure that the staff's enthusiasm and drive is harnessed and focused on key areas that will make a difference by amending plans for improvement so that they set out the academy's strategic direction, are sharply targeted and contain clear criteria for measuring success.
- Persevere with strategies to raise attendance so that it rises to 92% by December 2010.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring inspection by and Ofsted inspector before the next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The academy's GCSE results were very low last year, although higher than those of the previous year. Students begin their GCSE studies in Year 9. Some Year 11 students have already gained qualifications in English and mathematics, and the percentage with a good pass in these subjects is higher than it was last year, even though some are still to complete their courses. Last year, all groups of students made satisfactory progress from their starting points in Year 7, and some, notably those with a statement of special educational needs and lower-attaining boys, made progress at a particularly fast rate. The academy's data, confirmed by the standard of work in students' books, show that progress has accelerated and students in all year groups, including those who have

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special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are learning English as an additional language, are currently making good progress.

There is a close correlation between the quality of teaching in lessons and the students' response. Lessons in Mandarin, for example, are lively, engaging and pitched at the right level. Students respond with enthusiasm and growing confidence. Added to this, they understand clearly how they are doing and what they must do next. Well-planned lessons in physical education, dance and drama also give pupils the chance to shine; here they show their ability to work in teams and cooperate and are willing to evaluate their performance and improve their work. In other lessons, however, students are passive recipients of information, expected to watch or to listen for too long. This slows their progress.

The students are keen to participate in sporting activities. Although they know a good deal about healthy lifestyles, their choice of food does not always reflect this. Students have no worries about their safety; the youngest students reported that they are treated with respect and that the older ones support and help them. Students are involved in a wide range of activities in the local area. Although the academy seeks students' views, some are not aware of the ways that they can take part in decision-making. Events such as 'Chinese Week' make a strong contribution to students' cultural development. Taken overall, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	4

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

3

How effective is the provision?

The staff have a wealth of information about students' attainment, progress and any other factors that might affect their learning. Where teaching is most effective, this information is used to tailor tasks and activities so that they build on students' current levels of understanding and take account of their preferred styles of learning.

Expectations are high and resources such as interactive whiteboards are used to good effect. Teaching assistants are usually well deployed to provide additional support where needed. However, there is insufficient teaching of this high quality to ensure that students make good or better progress in every single lesson. There are still some lessons which lack the pace, rigour and variety that are needed to engage and enthuse the students. Teachers routinely draw students' attention to the levels or grades that they are working at and the targets they are aiming towards. Where tasks are not accurately matched to what students need to do to move on, rapid progress towards these targets is not assured. Similarly, when the teachers do not identify the objectives for the lesson with sufficient precision and then wait until the end of the lesson to check what has been learned and understood, the potential for students to make accelerated progress is lost.

Students in Years 7 and 8 are taught for much of the time in large groups in 'Learning Plazas'. State-of-the-art technology and flexible seating arrangements are used in these open spaces, and subjects are combined and taught in imaginative ways. The students respond well to this as it differs from the traditional model of classroom teaching and is seen to be fun. The curriculum reflects the academy's specialisms; for example, Mandarin and financial awareness are taught as part of the business and enterprise focus. The curriculum is increasingly personalised across Key Stage 4 with a range of vocational options, including land-based studies at the academy's farm. Because students begin their GCSE courses early and complete them when they are ready, they then have the scope and flexibility to begin sixth-form courses or undertake further vocational options at times that are appropriate for them.

Students' welfare is given high priority. The staff know individuals and their families very well and their interventions have made a positive difference to the lives of many. The staff work effectively with a wide range of agencies to support students' well-being and to help them manage difficult times. The success of their efforts shows in the rapidly improving outcomes for the students. Students' good progress can be attributed to improvements in their behaviour, attendance and attitudes to learning, together with the stimulating curriculum, well-focused interventions and support and an improving quality of teaching.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The academy's leaders know that improving teaching is vital in order to accelerate students' progress still further. To this end, the quality of teaching is frequently checked, and well-focused mentoring, coaching, guidance and training are provided for those teachers who need it. This work is having a positive impact and the proportion of teaching that is good or outstanding is increasing. The leaders also believe that improvement will come faster if everyone is able to contribute, and have established a forum for all to share their views, opinions and ideas. Governors play a prominent role in shaping the academy's direction and holding it to account for its performance. They are assiduous in ensuring that statutory responsibilities are met. Effective collaborative arrangements with Cornwallis Academy bring economies of scale and the opportunity to share skills and expertise.

The academy does an exceptional amount of work to promote cohesion in the local area, working with a wide range of partners including the council, a local housing trust, adult education providers and primary schools. The national and international dimensions of community cohesion are growing, for example though links with Yale University, but opportunities to learn about other faiths and cultures are not so well established. The academy makes every effort to engage with parents and carers, including by imaginative means such as setting up a stall in the local supermarket. Some parents and carers, however, remain difficult to reach. The strength of the work done in the local community and the commitment to improving the educational outcomes for the students illustrate the academy's commitment to, and success in promoting equality of opportunity. Procedures for keeping students safe are robust and effective.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2

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The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Very few parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. Their responses were largely positive, but some parents and carers indicated concerns about the school's promotion of healthy lifestyles and how well the academy meets individual students' needs. Inspectors found that the academy does much to encourage students to make healthy choices although not all follow the advice they are given. They also found that a good deal of attention is given to meeting students' academic needs and their welfare.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at New Line Learning Academy to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 36 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 667 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	7	19	24	67	5	14	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	10	28	25	69	1	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	15	42	18	50	2	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	33	19	53	5	14	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	11	31	22	61	1	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	6	17	23	64	6	17	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	19	22	61	7	19	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	10	28	24	67	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	6	17	22	61	7	19	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	7	19	26	72	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	4	11	28	78	3	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	13	36	21	58	2	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	14	39	18	50	3	8	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



5 March 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of New Line Learning Academy, Maidstone, ME15 9QL

Thank you for the welcome that you gave me and the members of the inspection team when we visited recently. We enjoyed meeting you in lessons and in discussion groups. We were also interested to see what you had written on your questionnaires. All of the information you gave helped us when we were making our decisions. Please read the full inspection report if you want to see our findings in more detail.

You are making good progress in your learning for these main reasons:

- you are given lots of well-focused support
- the curriculum is stimulating and is adapted to meet your needs
- the teaching is securely satisfactory and is improving
- attendance has risen a good deal
- your behaviour has improved.

It is clear that the academy's leaders and staff have put a lot of effort into making sure that you all have the opportunity to do as well as you can. You also deserve some of the credit for responding positively.

Your achievement is satisfactory. The academy's leaders want you to do even better, and we agree with this aim. We have asked them to focus on three things:

- boosting your attainment by making sure that all lessons pay attention to improving your basic skills; teachers make crystal clear to you what you are to learn and check this throughout the lesson; and you have more opportunities to be active learners
- strengthening improvement plans by including clearer ways of measuring success
- raising attendance to 92% by the end of this year.

You can help by making sure that you do not miss lessons unnecessarily and by letting your teachers know if there is something that you do not understand or is too easy in lessons.

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill

Her Majesty's Inspector

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