

The Link School Tudor Grove

Tudor Grove Centre, Portland Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR3 1SS

Inspection dates

12–13 June 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The recently appointed headteacher effectively shares her vision and ethos with school partners. In doing so, she creates a culture of aspiration and motivation which all staff and pupils support.
- The management committee has ensured that members have been recruited to the committee who can effectively challenge and support the leadership of the school.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and promote a culture of respect.
- Pupils' behaviour improves rapidly at The Link School Tudor Grove. Most pupils have significantly improved their behaviour over time.
- Disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to their peers. Leaders use the additional pupil premium funding well to engage pupils in learning, increasing both their educational achievement and their emotional well-being.
- Staff have responded well to the high-quality professional development opportunities on offer. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved.
- Typically, teachers plan learning to meet the widely differing needs of pupils. However, occasionally work lacks challenge, particularly for the most able pupils.
- The school's assessment information and work in pupils' books show that most pupils make good progress from their different starting points, especially in English and mathematics.
- Staff morale is high. Both staff and parents believe that the school is well led. All have confidence in the leaders to improve the school further.
- Pupils make significant progress in their rates of attendance over time. Overall, pupils' attendance, although below the national average, is improving.
- Pupils are well prepared to move between the different key stages within the provision. Leaders acknowledge that pupils' transition back into mainstream school is less effective and that more work is needed to ensure that pupils can successfully access mainstream education.
- Reading programmes are helping pupils to develop their reading skills. However, some pupils do not enjoy reading and therefore do not practise reading independently.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve outcomes for pupils by:
 - encouraging key stage 3 pupils to read for pleasure to develop their love of reading while broadening their reading selection
 - ensuring that pupils' work and learning across subjects is suitably challenging, particularly for the most able pupils
 - widening transition planning so that pupils are not only prepared for moving key stages within the school, but also for successful transition back into mainstream schools.
- Continue to develop strategies to improve pupils' attendance so that it is closer to the national average for secondary schools.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The recently appointed headteacher has rapidly inspired a culture of high aspiration for pupils' behaviour and achievement. As a result, pupils attend school ready to learn.
- Leading by example, the headteacher has enthused and motivated both the staff and pupils. Relationships between staff at all levels and the pupils are a strength of the school. The respect and care shown to pupils are evident in staff practice. Pupils mirror this respect towards their teachers and peers.
- In a short period of time, leaders have accurately identified strengths and weaknesses in the school, and they have acted swiftly to secure the improvements required. Leaders and staff use the newly developed behaviour policy effectively. Consequently, the number of fixed-term exclusions for pupils has reduced and the time pupils spend on their work and learning has increased.
- Staff morale is high. Staff appreciate the high quality of training from leaders. The professional development programme for staff is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning at the school.
- Leaders have put in to place a broad and varied curriculum, particularly in key stage 3, which focuses on deepening pupils' knowledge and understanding, particularly in English and mathematics. Consequently, pupils are enthused and motivated to learn.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported well across the curriculum. Values such as respect and tolerance are at the heart of the school. Pupils and staff demonstrate such values in their everyday work.
- The headteacher has implemented robust systems and processes, particularly in terms of assessing pupils' academic starting points and their current attainment and outcomes. Teachers use assessment information and leaders' advice well to ensure that learning is appropriate for all pupils. This is strengthening and supporting pupils' learning, progress and outcomes.
- Leaders use the pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils well. Additional support strategies, such as home tuition and home-school liaison, result in rapid improvement in pupils' attendance and their engagement in learning.
- Leaders ensure that the physical education and sport premium is used well. All pupils are involved in physical outdoor education every week. This fosters their engagement with learning, alongside improving their health and mental well-being.

Governance of the school

- The management committee has worked hard to reflect and make the necessary changes to become an effective committee that challenges and supports the leadership of the school.
- Management committee members know the school well because they scrutinise information about pupils' progress and visit the school regularly to talk with staff and

pupils. This both increases their knowledge and strengthens their ability to challenge leaders and managers.

- The members of the management committee are keen to develop their own understanding and skills. They undertake regular good-quality training and pursue personal development opportunities. They are enthusiastic and passionate about the school and are determined to oversee its further improvement.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding records are detailed. Leaders ensure that all appropriate checks are carried out on the suitability of staff who work with pupils.
- The designated safeguarding leaders are knowledgeable about their role. They hold detailed records and are confident to challenge external partners, including the local authority, to ensure that pupils' needs are met.
- An effective system is in place to ensure that all safeguarding concerns are recorded and, where necessary, shared appropriately.
- Pupils say, and parents agree, that pupils are safe in school. Pupils feel well supported and they know who to go to if they have a problem.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers know their pupils well and help them to make good progress from their starting points in a range of subjects, including reading, writing and mathematics. Not all pupils in key stage 3, however, develop a real love of reading.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together, set high expectations and use questioning effectively. Teachers probe pupils' understanding through targeted questioning. They identify and address pupils' misconceptions quickly.
- Baseline assessments and support plans are in place for all pupils. This results in teachers planning effectively for the needs of most pupils. During inspection, this was evident and particularly effective in mathematics, where small groups of pupils were working on suitably challenging algebra. At times, however, teachers do not plan enough challenge for pupils in their tasks, particularly for the most able.
- Teachers' secure subject knowledge, supported by effective professional development, is improving the quality of teaching. Teachers are encouraged to share good practice, which in turn is helping to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Pupils take pride in their written work and display good attitudes to learning.
- Teachers manage their classrooms well to ensure that disruptive behaviour does not have a negative effect on learning. Parents and pupils agree that behaviour does not disrupt learning.
- On occasion, some teachers do not consistently check that pupils understand what they need to do in order to improve their work. Sometimes pupils' misconceptions are not effectively tackled. This is acknowledged by the leaders and is being addressed.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils say that bullying is extremely rare. They say that they feel safe in school and know how to stay safe, particularly online. Pupils know who to go to if they have any concerns. Inspection evidence and the views of parents and staff confirm this.
- Teachers are quick to challenge the use of derogatory or abusive language. Racist incidents are rare but dealt with swiftly and in an effective manner.
- Lunchtime is calm and ordered. Staff and pupils eat together and enjoy healthy home-cooked food. Routines are embedded to ensure that pupils use suitable table manners and clean up after themselves.
- The welfare of a small number of pupils who attend alternative provision is addressed effectively. As a result, these pupils follow a personalised curriculum appropriate to their needs resulting in improvements in their behaviour, attendance and attitudes to learning.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders and staff set high expectations. The headteacher leads by example and staff model respectful behaviour at all times. As a result, pupils behave well in lessons, around the school site and in the community.
- The relationship between staff and pupils is a strength of the school. Pupils are respectful to each other, staff and visitors who are welcomed into the school.
- Instances of low-level disruption are rare and, when they do occur, teachers apply the behaviour policy consistently. Pupils are clear about the school's rewards and sanctions regarding behaviour. They understand the consequences if the 'wrong choices' are made while at school.
- Pupils' attendance is improving over time. Some pupils who have had particularly poor attendance previously have made rapid improvements and now attend more regularly. Overall attendance is much closer to the national average than it was previously.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The majority of pupils who are working at standards lower than those expected for their age make good progress from their starting points. Effective programmes of support, such as targeted individual tuition, are put in place to boost pupils' achievements.

- School progress information and work in pupils' books show that improvements are being made in both English and mathematics. This is due to the determination and skills of the subject leaders to improve pupils' outcomes.
- Effective support from teaching assistants ensures that pupils receive the help they need within the classroom. This positively impacts on the rapid improvement shown by some pupils in their work and learning.
- Work in pupils' books confirms that, over time, most are producing work that is of a good standard across the curriculum. Pupils' pride in their work is evident and they respond positively to improve their work. Teaching has been particularly effective in improving handwriting, and examples of writing at length were seen across all classes.
- Although the most able pupils achieve well overall, sometimes they are given work that lacks challenge when they are capable of achieving more. This lessens the pace of progress for a small number of pupils.
- Key stage 2 pupils read fluently and confidently. Most pupils spoken with during inspection said that they enjoyed reading. The most able pupils can discuss the wider aspects and concepts within the texts and books that they are reading. Leaders recognise, however, that there is much to do to encourage pupils in key stage 3 to read widely for pleasure and to develop a love of reading.
- Transition within the provision is good, and pupils are well prepared and excited to continue their education within school. Although transition with some other linked providers is strong, transition back to mainstream school is identified as an area for improvement by leaders and through this inspection. Leaders are working closely with the behaviour support team to strengthen this aspect of their work.

School details

Unique reference number	135640
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10049076

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	7 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	61
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Tony Cunningham
Headteacher	Donna Walker
Telephone number	01915 623 200
Website	www.linkschool.org.uk
Email address	caroline.granton@schools.sunderland.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 February 2018

Information about this school

- Since 2012, there have been significant changes in leadership and management, with the current headteacher being seconded into the role in September 2017, and permanently appointed in May 2018.
- The school makes provision for key stage 2 and 3 pupils who have been permanently excluded or are at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools. Pupils are placed at the school for varying amounts of time with the aim to make a successful transition back to mainstream school.
- The school is currently oversubscribed, with a higher than anticipated number of pupils being, or at risk of being, excluded from local schools.
- All the current pupils are from a White British background. A small number have an education, health and care plan and/or are looked after by the local authority.
- The school uses alternative provision in the local area.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited parts of lessons in a range of subjects, covering all classes. Some of these visits took place jointly with senior leaders. During visits to classrooms, inspectors looked in pupils' workbooks and questioned pupils about their learning.
- Inspectors observed pupils' conduct while they were arriving at school, as well as during break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils both informally and formally. They also spoke with five parents and with members of the staff team.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also met with four members of the management committee, including the chair.
- An inspector visited external provision used by the school.
- An inspector met with the vulnerable children services manager and the school improvement service manager from the local authority.
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including the school self-evaluation report, school development plan and performance management documentation. Inspectors also reviewed minutes of meetings from the management committee members, records of the monitoring of teaching and learning, and information relating to pupils' attendance and achievement. Safeguarding documentation and records relating to behaviour were also examined.

Inspection team

Tricia Stevens, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Lyndsey Brown

Ofsted Inspector

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