

29th November 2018



Mrs Donna Walker
Headteacher
The Link School
Waverly Terrace
Sunderland
Tyne & Wear
SR4 6TA

COE Review Date: 12th November 2018

Summary

The Link School is a Pupil Referral Unit for pupils in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 housed on two sites.

The Link School, Tudor Grove, is the designated Key Stage 2 and 3 PRU for the City of Sunderland Local Authority. The school is funded for 48 places. There are 18 learners in key stage 2 and 26 learners in key stage 3. Learners start at the school following a period of significant disruption in their education. Since the last inspection the complex needs of learners has increased significantly particularly the number of learners identified as being on the autistic spectrum or with severe SEMH concerns. 61% of learners are currently single registered at Tudor Grove. Almost all come from the City of Sunderland but a minority come from other local authorities such as Durham, Liverpool or Gateshead.

The Link School, Pallion, is the designated Key Stage 4 PRU for the City of Sunderland Local Authority. The school is commissioned for 78 places. There are 73 learners on roll. 31 in Year 10 and 42 in year 11.

Learners start at the school following a period of significant disruption in their education. Almost all come from the City of Sunderland but a minority come from other local authorities such as Durham or Gateshead or, very occasionally, other parts of the country.

The percentage of learners who are disadvantaged is well above the national average. Currently 67% of learners attract Pupil Premium funding. Currently the majority of learners are from a White British ethnic background, 79.4% are boys and 21.56% are girls. Almost all learners are on the special needs register. Across both sites there are a significant number of learners open to multi-agency working including Children in Need, Looked After Children, Early help and Child Protection.

The curriculum is broad and balanced. Learners have access to high quality educational experiences. The curriculum is taught by predominantly highly skilled teachers and HLTAs.

AWARD OFFICES

Inclusion Quality Mark Award
Ling House
173 Slieveboy Road
Claudy
BT47 4AS
United Kingdom

CONTACT

Tel. 028 7127 7857
Fax. 028 7127 7856
info@iqmaward.com
www.iqmaward.com

Company Registration No.
07748285

Company Registered Address:
Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd
Grove House Lutyens Close
Chineham
Basingstoke
Hampshire
RG24 8AG

Following a period of protracted turbulence 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. Since then, as noted by Ofsted Inspectors, the headteacher has *"...driven the school forward with vision and purpose (and) has rapidly inspired a culture of high aspiration for pupils' behaviour and achievement"*.

It was clear from my visits to classrooms at both Tudor Grove and Pallion, that teachers and teaching assistants are highly skilled, enthusiastic and dedicated. In all classrooms I visited, learners were positively engaged and enjoying their lessons. There was a calm yet industrious atmosphere in all classrooms and learners with whom I spoke, were polite and courteous and clearly proud of their school and their achievements. Learners wore school uniform and collectively presented a very positive impression of the school. It is testament to leaders and in particular the highly skilled teachers and teaching assistants, that relationships were mutually respectful and purposeful.

There were many positive comments from parents and carers recorded on the routinely administered questionnaire, examples include:

"The 1:1 teachers really make an effort to get to know the kids which makes them want to learn more because they are given respect."

"The staff are very child centred. They will look for ways to engage the young people in next step activities."

"Staff genuinely care about the pupils and any progress they can make."

"I receive phone calls about good behaviour."

Both sites, although appropriately different in appearance and 'feel' indicating the ages of the learners, were clearly very well maintained and respected by learners. Displays in corridors and classrooms were of high quality and reflected the breadth and richness of the curriculum on offer at The Link School.

One of the displays I saw proudly celebrated the work of the school in promoting anti-bullying strategies. The school was awarded the Platinum Charter mark for Anti Bullying in 2016 and is the highest recognition Sunderland schools can achieve for their work in this area. The school continues to hold the platinum award. I spoke to a Higher-Level Teaching Assistant who works very closely with the lead for safeguarding and who is responsible for the anti-bullying programme. There was ample evidence available to show the impressive work that is a clear strength of the school. As Ofsted inspectors found, *"Pupils say that bullying is extremely rare"*.

From each key stage, there are two Anti-Bullying Ambassadors who help school leaders to continue developing this aspect of the school's work which includes meeting with the Safeguarding team every six weeks. The Ambassadors also wrote a 'child-friendly policy' which was made available for me to read. Each term the school invites external speakers to visit and run workshops on a variety of pertinent topics which have included child sexual exploitation and cyber bullying.

The school actively encourages learners to participate in fundraising activities for charitable causes. There are three charities supported each year including the Macmillan Cancer trust plus two other charities chosen by staff and learners.

Since her appointment, the headteacher has implemented robust systems and processes for monitoring learners' progress. As Ofsted inspectors found *"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"*. The headteacher is clear that the quality of teaching is paramount in improving outcomes for learners and again, as Ofsted Inspectors found, *"Teachers know their pupils well and help them to make good progress from their starting points...Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together, set high expectations and use questioning effectively."*

The school's Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) programmes are outstanding. Leaders clearly value the importance of effective CEIAG and recognise the potential for such programmes to raise aspirations and enable young people to make informed decisions about their future employment options.

The school decided to apply for the Gatsby Benchmark Pilot in order to help improve the existing provision. Now in the third year of the pilot, the school has achieved all of the benchmarks as verified by the University of Derby. In April 2018, the school received the stage 2 Quality in Careers Standard and expects to achieve stage 3 by July 2019. In the report it was noted that *"A committed careers team...are developing the careers provision and engaging colleagues in a whole school approach"*.

It was also noted that the school has strong links with external careers services and engages with many organisations in order to provide work placements. The school hosts a careers fair and there were 29 different employers representing banking, NHS, HMRC and Sunderland University alongside, engineering and construction industries. Work experience is bespoke and is offered to learners when they are 'work ready'. In discussion, I heard several examples of how work placements had led to employment after learners had left the school. The school is a member of the North East Careers Hub and is amongst 50 schools who have exemplary practice and provision for CEIAG. There is an expectation that they share their excellent practice with other schools. The school's pastoral leads for KS4 and KS3 also act as careers leads. The lead for KS4 is undertaking training and has already achieved level 4 in Carer Guidance and Development and is working towards level 6 so that they can offer independent advice and guidance.

The school's Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) figures are impressive and as a proxy measure, they underline the significant improvements made in this area of the school's provision and the capacity to improve still further. In 2015, of the 45 school leavers 60% were NEET; in 2017, of the 65 school leavers 9% were NEET. This is impressive progress by any measure.

The school is able to offer other services to schools and the Behaviour Support Service works with schools and academies to improve behaviour and therefore secure the engagement of young people. The behaviour Support Service provides support, advice,

outreach and specialist training, for example Team Teach through a Service Level Agreement.

I met the recently appointed SEND Administration Officer who has overhauled the monitoring of SEND provision and learners' progress. Records are centrally held and also available to all staff so that appropriate planning can be made in order to better meet learner's individual needs.

There is a clear commitment to the emotional well-being of staff and the headteacher has taken responsibility for leading on this aspect of the school's development priorities. I was told about the 'Celebrating Success' initiative that results in a member of staff being awarded with a thoroughly deserved half day off school each month because of their above and beyond commitment to the school.

As with all aspects of the school's work, planning is meticulous and well thought through. I was provided with a range of documents which demonstrate leaders' effective strategic and operational planning. There is a palpable consistency across both sites which is helping to improve the overall provision for some of the most disadvantaged children who attend the Link School.

Recommendation

The Link School continues to move from strength to strength in terms of its inclusive practice and I am of the opinion that the school fully meets the standard required by the Inclusion Quality Mark Centre of Excellence review. I recommend that the school retains its IQM Centre of Excellence Status and is reviewed again in 12 months. The next review will look closely at how the school has interacted with its Inclusion Cluster and promoted continuing outreach. Evidence of Cluster working will underpin the capacity for the school to maintain its COE status.

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:



.....

Joe McCann MBA NPQH
Director of Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd

Assessment Commentary on COE Action Plan:-

- Leadership is highly effective and ambitious for all the children at The Link School. There is a real sense of moral purpose and a strong inclusive ethos. There are detailed plans for continued development within which the following constitute the IQM action plan.
- Quite correctly, the school recognises the importance of emotional health and well-being and particularly so of the staff in their quest to improve outcomes for learners still further. To this end, the school intends to continue to improve the emotional health and well-being of staff and pupils in school.
- Given the purpose of the school, it is right that leaders should seek to ensure that there are opportunities for successful re-integration of PEX/dual registered learners back into mainstream education.
- The school has an excellent Behaviour Support Services which has so much to offer to other schools. The school intends to continue to plan and expand the BSS training offer to include Teen Triple P and Youth Mental Health First Aid to schools.

Further Developments agreed after discussion:-

- It was agreed that the school should consider applying for Flagship status at its next review in twelve months.

Assessor: Barry Carney

Review Date: 12th November 2018