

The Linden Academy

Osborne Road, Luton, Bedfordshire LU1 3HJ

Inspection dates

30–31 January 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- There has been significant instability at the school since the previous inspection. This has resulted in a decline in the impact of leaders' work and, consequently, in standards.
- Children and pupils do not make the good progress of which they are capable, including in early years. Staffing changes and an inconsistency in teachers' expectations of pupils mean that pupils' progress is too slow.
- Governors are not yet sufficiently skilled to assure themselves that leaders' actions are moving the school forward rapidly enough.
- Leaders, including a number who are new, do not yet know the difference that they are making to the provision in the school. For example, their evaluation of the impact of the additional funding that they receive is imprecise, and their use of assessment to pinpoint where pupils need more help is not fully embedded.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are too low. Teachers do not use the information about how well pupils are doing with sufficient precision to plan learning that helps them to make rapid progress. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils.
- Pupils do not yet receive sufficient opportunities in the wider curriculum to be able to develop subject-specific knowledge and skills confidently, or apply their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Some pupils have not yet developed effective learning behaviours. At times, most notably when teaching is less engaging or not well suited to pupils' needs, these pupils lose interest and disrupt learning.
- A significant minority of parents and carers do not have complete faith in the school's ability to resolve their concerns.

The school has the following strengths

- Committed leaders and governors have a good understanding of the areas of priority in the school.
- The school's provision for physical education (PE) is well considered and ensures that pupils are taught well in this subject.
- The teaching of reading in the early years and key stage 1 is effective. Pupils enjoy reading and demonstrate good phonics skills.
- Over time, attendance has improved so that it is now in line with the national average. Persistent absence is also rapidly reducing.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to develop the quality of leadership and management, by:
 - further reviewing leadership roles and accountabilities so that leaders are held tightly to account for their impact on raising standards
 - sharpening the analysis of assessment information to identify and act on pupils' slower progress more accurately and more rapidly
 - ensuring that leaders, including middle leaders, provide teachers with helpful feedback that directly impacts on the progress that pupils' make
 - evaluating the use of funding so that it is better targeted to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities
 - improving the skills of governors to undertake more precise review of leaders' work and impact
 - developing better communication and relationships with parents so that they are fully confident in the leaders' ability to raise standards in behaviour and achievement
 - ensuring that the wider curriculum is sufficiently well planned and taught so that all pupils develop skills and knowledge across a range of subjects.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching, to accelerate pupils' progress, including in the early years by:
 - making sure that all adults use assessment information to plan suitably challenging work for pupils and have high expectations about what pupils can achieve, especially the most able pupils
 - making sure that additional help is provided for pupils who are not on track to attain their target, especially if they are disadvantaged or have SEN and/or disabilities
 - improving the teaching of writing, so that pupils routinely have opportunities to write and to apply their writing skills across other subject areas.
- Improve the quality of leaders' monitoring so that they can develop effective strategies and a greater consistency between staff about how best to support the few pupils who do not yet know how to behave appropriately.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, The Linden Academy has undergone many complex changes including staffing changes, a rapid growth of pupils, and move of location. The school's journey has been a unique one that has presented leaders with an unprecedented level of challenge. Leaders, governors and the trust underestimated how much this hindered school improvement work, and were slow to identify the impact on pupils' progress.
- The trust's restructure of the leadership team is not yet working collectively well enough to raise standards quickly. The trust's decision to undertake these changes is starting to bring improvements, but too many leaders do not know the extent of their roles and responsibilities and how they overlap with those of other leaders. This means that it is more difficult for governors and the trust to hold leaders fully to account and, therefore, is slowing their ability to make rapid improvement.
- The new head of school, with the competent support of new leaders, has quickly identified, implemented and reviewed systems in the school to secure more rigorous checking and evaluating of the school's performance. For example, a review of assessment showed that it was not fit for the school's purpose and so a new system is being implemented. However, much of this work is recent and is only just beginning to make a difference.
- Leaders' monitoring of assessment information does not consistently identify the underachievement and the progress of different groups, including pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and the most able. Consequently, groups of pupils are not making consistently good progress.
- Although the quality of leaders' checks on teaching is improving, they are not yet frequent or precise enough to secure a realistic view of the quality of teaching. This includes checks undertaken by middle leaders. As a result, while there are improvements in teaching, they are not yet bringing sustained improvements in pupils' progress.
- The evaluation of the effectiveness of pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils is not thorough enough. This has meant that, over time, disadvantaged pupils have not progressed as well as they could have because resources have not been targeted effectively. Furthermore, leaders' have not been precise enough about what difference the funding is making to disadvantaged pupils' achievement.
- The trust reviewed its provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, but this has not made a rapid difference to pupils' progress or to the impact of leaders' actions. In particular, leaders do not know the impact that the funding they receive makes on the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities sharply enough.
- There is inconsistency in the subject skills being taught, which is resulting in some pupils not having enough opportunity to develop their proficiency in other subjects aside from English and mathematics. However, the school's theme-based creative curriculum does provide opportunities for children and pupils to access a range of subjects, supported by other schools in the trust. Specialist teachers are used and this

has been particularly effective in the teaching of PE. Pupils enjoy their PE lessons and many spoken to during the inspection cited this as one of their favourite subjects that they feel they 'do well in'.

- While most parents are positive about many aspects of the school's work, especially those with children in Reception, a significant minority of parents raised concerns about the lack of communication between home and school. This is particularly in relation to changes that have taken place during the last two years and to behaviour. Parents are concerned about disruptions to their children's learning because of the high staff turnover. These parents do not have confidence that the problems are yet resolved.
- The processes in place to manage and improve the performance of staff are ensuring that all staff are held to account for how well pupils achieve. These processes reflect closely the priorities for improvement identified in the school's development plan.
- Leaders use the sport premium funding effectively to improve pupils' participation in sporting activities and develop staff expertise through additional staff training. The impact of this is that pupils are starting to access a broader variety of sporting experiences such as golf and archery as well as participating more in tournaments and sports festivals. Resources are being purchased to enhance the quality of teaching of PE.
- New leaders are successfully raising the profile of, and starting to impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning in English and mathematics. This work is currently more apparent in upper key stage 2. The new English and mathematics leaders recognise that there is still much work to be done to ensure that English and mathematics teaching and learning are consistently effective across the whole school. This work is still in its infancy and it is too early to see the full impact.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. For example, pupils' books showing comparisons and similarities between religions such as Judaism and Christianity and additionally, the 'house system' and assembly themes around the school's core values are all successfully helping to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.
- Along with the changes at The Linden Academy, the trust has also undergone major changes. While these have been significant, the trust has provided effective support developing a new leadership team and securing more stability on which to further raise standards.
- There is a positive working partnership between the trust schools. Expertise is shared, and an effective programme of professional development is delivered and disseminated throughout the trust schools. Although this work is in its infancy, there is evidence that staff are benefiting and, subsequently, applying it to their own practice. For example, the training and support that teachers new to the profession or those who are training are receiving are helping them to undertake their roles confidently and with increasing effectiveness.

Governance of the school

- While recognising the challenging, exceptional circumstances the school has faced, governors make no excuses for the weaker outcomes of pupils. They are passionate

and determined that each pupil should achieve well. Nevertheless, though the governing body is supporting the school to move forward, governors have not managed to prevent the less-than-good progress made by too many pupils over time. This is because their work is not refined and precisely enough focused on the basic principles that will ensure that swift progress is made to improve and raise standards at the school.

- Governors contribute a range of skills and experience that enables them to fulfil many of their duties and to hold leaders to account. They ask some challenging questions. However, although this is the case, the challenge governors present is not followed through rigorously enough to secure rapid enough improvement. This is especially the case when leaders present new initiatives. Although governors question the worth of anything new being implemented, they allow too much time to pass before it is evident that it is not making enough of a difference to children's and pupils' achievement.
- Governors make regular visits to school to find out about aspects of its work. Some governors' records, however, show an overly positive view of the progress that leaders are making, emphasising what leaders have done rather than the difference it has made. For example, they are fully aware of how the pupil premium is spent, but are not as astute about the impact that it is having on outcomes. This is a similar case for the SEN provision; although much has been done, the impact of this on the achievement of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has not been scrupulously evaluated.
- The safeguarding governor checks the school's policies and procedures regularly. Governors have received training in child protection and safer recruitment. They regularly visit the school to check on the school's work and have an accurate understanding of the school. Furthermore, they are determined in their vision to ensure that all pupils at The Linden Academy have a good education that prepares them well for the next stages in their education.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders, including governors, ensure that all adults working with children are kept up to date with training on how to keep children safe. Staff are trained regularly to an appropriate level and understand the procedures to follow should they have any concerns. All staff are able to clearly articulate the signs of what to look out for to ensure that pupils are safe.
- Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe through a variety of curriculum opportunities. They know how to stay safe outside of school and what to do if they have any worries. Pupils said that there is always an adult whom they can talk to and that teachers act on any concerns swiftly. This is evidenced in the behaviour records kept. However, the implementation and analysis of these are in the very early stages and it is evident that there are repeated cases of poorer behaviour.
- Records show that vulnerable pupils and their families are supported effectively. The family support worker is providing effective support to families in challenging circumstances. In her short time in post, the family support worker is beginning to develop some effective relationships with families to secure more positive interaction

between school and home. Parents who have been privy to this said that they value the support that they receive from the school.

- Evidence shows that the family support worker is quick to follow up any concerns in order to put appropriate early help in place. For example, the 'red triangle', 'niggles' and 'concern' form system she has implemented ensures that referrals to social care and other professional services are appropriate, thorough and timely. This is guaranteeing that, when support is needed, it is provided quickly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- There is too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning across the school, particularly in writing and mathematics. Some teachers do not use information about what pupils can already do to plan and adjust work or respond quickly enough when pupils are ready to move on to learning that is more difficult. This is particularly the case for the most able.
- A number of pupils do not show pride in their work, and a range of pupils' books from across the school demonstrates that some teachers and other adults do not demand a consistently high standard of presentation.
- Not all teachers have high enough expectations of pupils' behaviour. In these instances, pupils become disengaged and their low-level disruption impacts on the progress both they and others make.
- Sometimes, teachers focus too much on pupils' completion of tasks in a specific instructed way rather than on the quality of the learning taking place. This leads to pupils working through an activity without a full understanding of what they are expected to learn, which, consequently, slows their progress.
- Although teachers plan a range of contexts for writing, there are not consistently high expectations of pupils' quality of handwriting, and too often teachers are not picking up errors in pupils' sentence structure, vocabulary use and spelling. The most able pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to extend and apply their writing skills at a higher standard.
- In mathematics, there is some evidence in pupils' work that number and calculation skills are taught effectively across the school. Although this ensures that pupils are well placed to solve more complex problems and to start to reason mathematically, opportunities for deeper thinking and application of the school's chosen 'mastery' approach are variable across classes. This is resulting in variable progress being made by all pupils.
- Reading for enjoyment is encouraged well and, more recently, the profile of reading has been raised in the school. For example, a sample of pupils' reading records show that many pupils read frequently, both at home and at school, and there are designated reading areas in classrooms. Weaker readers receive additional support and encouragement that help them to develop their phonics knowledge and skill and their understanding when reading different types of books.
- The teaching of early reading skills in Reception and key stage 1 is effective. Children and pupils were observed using their phonics to successfully blend and segment words as a result of accurate teaching. Where this is most successful, teachers have high

expectations of pupils' participation and engagement. Consequently, pupils respond enthusiastically and achieve well, demonstrating a sound understanding of what they read.

- There are examples of teaching assistants being well deployed across the school. This is especially the case in one-to-one situations and for those children and pupils who speak English as an additional language. In these individualised instances, teaching assistants are effectively involved in planning and know the pupils they work with well. They use questioning to elicit a pupil's understanding and, where appropriate, develop a pupil's learning further. In these instances, pupils are supported well. However, where the purpose of learning is less certain, the positive impact of teaching assistants' work is less effective and pupils do not make the progress they are capable of.
- Where teaching is of higher quality, for example in Year 6, pupils make progress through activities that are more closely aligned to their abilities. In these situations, teachers demonstrate that they have good subject knowledge and briskly move pupils on once they have secured the learning.
- PE is taught effectively at The Linden Academy. Pupils demonstrate proficiency in their PE skills from an early age and apply this to all aspects of the PE curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Leaders' monitoring of pupils' needs is not sufficiently well developed to ensure that those few pupils who require additional support and strategies to self-regulate their emotions and behaviours, receive timely and effective help. This reduces these pupils' ability to engage positively in their school experience, and to develop self-esteem.
- A significant number of parents do not feel that the school deals effectively with behaviour and bullying. While the inspection team found evidence to indicate that there is more work to be done to improve behaviour, school records demonstrate that leaders take parents' concerns seriously and respond appropriately.
- The majority of pupils said that they feel safe. There were some mixed responses from pupils regarding behaviour and how they feel when out at play. Pupils are all very secure, however, in their belief that all adults are there to hear their concerns and they all feel that they could approach any adult in school with a concern and know it would be dealt with.
- In every year group, the curriculum includes work about safety, behaviour and well-being. Leaders prioritised these aspects as part of their recent review of the teaching of personal, social, health education (PSHE). This was in response to the recent review of behaviour so that it is explicitly linked to The Linden Academy core values.
- Pupils talked knowledgeably about how to stay safe. They were able to explain clearly to inspectors how to protect their personal information from people they do not know, particularly when online.

- Leaders take pupils' views seriously. Members of the student council are democratically elected and 'pupil voice' is used frequently to find out what pupils think. For example, the family support worker recently carried out a safeguarding questionnaire with pupils to find out what they think about safeguarding in school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Some pupils' behaviour in classrooms is variable. While there are pupils who listen attentively, remain focused on their work and try hard, there are a few who do not follow instructions as a matter of course and require constant prompting to do so. This causes some disruption in lessons and, consequently, impacts on the learning of others.
- A few pupils do not consistently show care and kindness to others at break and lunchtimes, most notably in corridors and the playground. This is especially the case with a few of the older pupils. This indicates that these pupils are not always taking responsibility for their behaviour and, therefore, still require guidance and support to do what is expected of them.
- The recent work to reduce behavioural incidents is starting to have a positive impact. For example, an analysis of the school's behavioural concerns audit shows a reduction in each level of concern category since the start of this academic year. This demonstrates that pupils are responding to leaders' implementation of the revised rewards and sanctions policy.
- Pupils' overall attendance is currently broadly in line with the national average. Last year, the persistent absence rate was above the national average for those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils. So far this academic year, it has reduced as a result of the concerted efforts of leaders to improve attendance through a range of successful strategies. Positive work with families and the inclusion of external agencies to provide support has also contributed to a reduction in persistent absence.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- In 2017, the proportion of pupils at key stage 2 who reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was below the national average. Equally, the proportion of pupils at key stage 2 who reached the higher standard in reading and writing was below the national average.
- Most-able pupils do not consistently make the progress that they should across all classes. This is because, in some areas of the school, expectations of what most-able pupils can and should be achieving are not consistently high enough. They, along with other pupils, are also not being given enough opportunities to write at sufficient length to develop their ideas and skills in subjects other than English. As a result, not enough pupils achieve the higher standards they are capable of.
- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils has been weak and lags behind that of other pupils nationally, especially in reading. Although leaders are now making sure that teachers know who the disadvantaged pupils in their classes are and during

regular progress meetings with teachers hold them to account for their disadvantaged pupils' progress, the effect of these changes is yet to be seen.

- Progress for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is inconsistent. When pupils are supported effectively and given appropriate work accurately suited to their needs, they achieve well. At other times, tasks and support are not so precisely targeted, so pupils do not learn as well as they could.
- There has been a positive three-year trend in which the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been consistently above the national average. However, in 2017, there was a 'dip' in the number of pupils who met the expected standard and it was below the national average. Inspection evidence shows that phonics is taught effectively, and the school's current information is indicating that the proportion of pupils likely to successfully meet the expected standard in phonics will increase.
- In 2017, the proportion of key stage 1 pupils attaining both the expected and greater depth standards was in line with the national average for reading, and above average in writing and mathematics. This prepared pupils well for the key stage 2 phase of their education.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language progress well. This is because of the higher quality of the individualised support they receive when they are learning basic English language skills.
- School information and work in books show that pupils who are currently in Year 6 are making better progress. A higher proportion of pupils are on track to reach the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave in 2018. As a result, they are now being better prepared for their move to secondary school than some pupils in previous years.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Although quickly improving, leaders do not yet have an in-depth understanding and evaluation of the quality of all aspects of the early years provision. For example, there is a lack of knowledge about how the additional funding for disadvantaged children in early years is being used and what difference it is making to children's achievement.
- From broadly typical starting points on entry to Reception, children generally make expected progress. Although outcomes at the end of the Reception Year have been better than seen nationally in recent years, ensuring that children are being prepared for Year 1, children are capable of achieving better.
- While the majority of children follow instructions and show interest in what they are learning, this is inconsistent across Reception. This is particularly the case when teaching is not as strong. In these instances, children demonstrate that they want to explore, investigate and find out for themselves. However, the restriction to be able to do this causes unsettled behaviour and, consequently, children make less progress.
- Teaching is improving, although it is not yet consistently good. Teachers plan some meaningful tasks, which children respond to well. However, teachers and other adults do not use assessment information as well as they should to plan the next steps. This

holds back children from achieving as well as they are capable of. This is especially noteworthy for most-able children, for whom there is a lack of challenge to ensure that they are able to extend and deepen their learning further.

- The teaching of early reading skills is effective and children confidently use their growing phonic knowledge to work out how to read unknown words. They transfer these skills to their writing and are able to form letters and write words which can be read, which they do as a matter of routine. For example, children practise writing through the school's chosen approach, 'recognise, form and pronounce', and they are familiar with this. However, there are fewer opportunities for children to write freely and for different purposes. As a result, children's progress in writing is slower than in reading.
- Parents spoke positively about the way that their children have quickly settled into the Reception classes. They said that they feel welcomed into school and have had lots of relevant information prior to their child joining the school. Parents are engaged in contributing to their child's learning journey, for example posting photos of their child's activities from home.
- Safeguarding arrangements in the early years are effective. Children feel safe and are happy to come to school.

School details

Unique reference number	137324
Local authority	Luton
Inspection number	10041531

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	455
Appropriate authority	The board of trustees
Chair	Elizabeth Badu
Head of School	Lesley Whittle
Telephone number	01582 211441
Website	linden.thesharedlearningtrust.org.uk
Email address	linden@thesharedlearningtrust.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 July 2013

Information about this school

- The Linden Academy is a larger-than-average primary school. It has grown considerably over the last two years from a two-form to a three-form entry school.
- The school's status has changed over time. Initially, it was an independent-converter until 2011, when it became a free school under the name of Barnfield Moorlands Free School. In 2012, the school joined the Barnfield Federation and then became a part of the Shared Learning Trust. The school changed its name to The Linden Academy and moved to its current new building and location in September 2016.
- The current executive principal and head of school took up their posts in September 2017.
- The proportion of pupils whose first language is not, or believed not to be, English is higher than the national average.
- Both the proportion of pupils who are supported for SEN, and the number of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care

plan, are below average.

- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium is below the national average.
- In 2017, the school met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment in English and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- The lead inspector met with the head of school, the executive principal and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust.
- All of the inspection team observed lessons across the school, which included some joint observations with the head of school and deputy headteacher. While doing this, inspectors reviewed a wide range of pupils' work in books in all subject areas.
- A scrutiny of pupils' books was carried out jointly by inspectors with the English and mathematics leaders and the executive principal.
- An inspector listened to a few pupils in Year 1 and Year 3 read, and another inspector observed an assembly.
- Although only one response was received from the pupil survey, inspectors met formally with groups of pupils. They also spoke to a large number of pupils during lessons and at break and lunchtimes to gather their views.
- The lead inspector and another inspector met with a group of parents. Additionally, inspectors spoke to parents at the beginning and end of the school day.
- There was a meeting between the lead inspector and the chair of the governing body and three other governors, one of whom was the safeguarding governor.
- Responses from 58 parents and carers to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and 53 free-text responses from parents were analysed.
- Inspectors considered 27 responses to the staff questionnaire and spoke to teachers and support staff, including a group of teaching assistants, throughout the course of the inspection.
- The inspection team took into account a wide range of information, including the school's website, development plan, assessment information from its pupil tracking system and leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning. Inspectors reviewed documentation relating to safeguarding, as well as governing body minutes and 'health check' information from the trust.

Inspection team

Tracy Fielding, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Simon Harbrow	Ofsted Inspector
Annie Hookway	Ofsted Inspector

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This is factually accurate to the evidence base and is reflective of the high proportion of parents who were dissatisfied with the provision