

Inspection of The Linden Academy

Osborne Road, Luton, Bedfordshire LU1 3HJ

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 December 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils' well-being is a priority at Linden Academy. Pupils benefit from the care that adults provide. Because of this, pupils feel happy and safe in school. Pupils say they can talk to any adult about anything.

A well-developed culture of trust encourages pupils to share their worries. Pupils are valued members of a respectful school community where difference and diversity are celebrated. Pupils' behaviour reflects leaders' values of respect and understanding. Incidents of bullying are rare. Pupils say that staff respond quickly if they raise a concern.

The curriculum provides pupils with a broad range of experiences. Pupils are enthusiastic and keen to learn. They listen carefully and try their best. However, pupils are not achieving as well as they should in some subjects. This is because the curriculum does not consistently support them to secure the knowledge they need to be successful.

Pupils are being well prepared to become members of the wider community. They are encouraged to think about the decisions they make and to consider the feelings of others. Through the planned curriculum and assemblies, pupils are supported to develop self-belief, and kindness. Pupils are proud of their individual achievements and are keen to celebrate the success of their peers.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders are in the process of establishing a curriculum to prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain. Leaders have renewed curriculum plans in English, mathematics and some other subjects. These clearly set out what pupils should learn, and in what order they learn the knowledge that is planned. This is starting to have a positive impact on what pupils know and remember.

In a few subjects, the important knowledge that pupils need to learn is not clear enough. This means that what pupils are learning does not routinely build upon what pupils have been taught before. Also, in some lessons, teachers do not consistently provide opportunities for pupils to practise the knowledge they are learning. For example, when attempting complex tasks in mathematics, some pupils struggle to recall the crucial knowledge they have previously been taught. Pupils need this knowledge to be secure and need to know how to apply it, to be successful.

Leaders ensure that reading is a priority. There is a new programme to teach phonics and early reading. Staff are receiving training, and this is beginning to ensure consistency in the teaching of phonics. Reading for enjoyment is well promoted. Pupils have access to high-quality texts to support their learning and development across the curriculum.

Pupils who are at risk of falling behind in reading are quickly identified and given appropriate support to help them keep up. Pupils take home books that closely match their phonics knowledge. This helps them practise and build their confidence as readers. Older pupils who have gaps in knowledge, and those pupils who speak English as an additional language, receive targeted support in reading. This helps them make rapid progress and catch up.

Adults quickly and accurately identify and plan support for the most vulnerable pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is a strength in the work staff do. As a result, these pupils can access the planned curriculum because of the precise, well-planned support they receive.

Staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils follow well-established routines and show respect for each other and adults in the school. Classroom environments are calm, and pupils are engaged. Pupils play happily together during breaktimes. Leaders have effective routines for monitoring and following up any worries that are shared. This is having a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and attendance.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. These help pupils develop other interests, including sports. Staff encourage pupils to consider their responsibilities to care for others, for example by supporting a local food bank.

Unlike the rest of the school, the curriculum in early years is fully in place. Leaders have high expectations for children to achieve, whatever their starting point. They have considered how the curriculum prepares children for Year 1 and beyond. Children are supported particularly well to develop their independence and curiosity. Adults engage children in meaningful learning and purposeful play. This is ensuring that children are developing their communication, language and early mathematical understanding very well.

Trust leaders share in the ambition to prepare pupils well for the future. Trustees draw upon their wide range of skills and expertise to support leaders effectively to improve the school. All appropriate monitoring checks are undertaken. The information gathered from this work ensures trustees hold leaders to account effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Leaders have fully considered the wider community and are aware of the challenges that exist. This supports leaders to know how to respond in the most effective way to make sure families are supported and pupils are kept safe.

Staff are well trained in safeguarding and receive regular updates. All adults are proactive in their work to ensure all pupils, including those that are most vulnerable, receive the support that they need.

The curriculum content ensures pupils know how to keep themselves safe. Pupils are aware of risks and talk confidently about how they stay safe when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have recently introduced a new programme to teach phonics and early reading. This programme is in the early stages of implementation. Leaders should continue to ensure all staff receive the training, guidance and support they need, so they feel confident in teaching the programme consistently.
- Leaders' curriculum thinking is not yet detailed enough in a small number of subject plans. This means that the important knowledge that pupils need to learn is not clearly laid out to ensure pupils build upon what they have learned before. Leaders should make sure this work is completed swiftly, so that teachers are confident they know what should be taught at each stage to ensure pupils achieve well throughout the school.
- Teachers do not consistently plan opportunities for pupils to revisit and practise what they already know and what they are learning. Leaders should ensure that teachers plan lessons, giving pupils the chance to apply what they know more confidently and fluently.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	137324
Local authority	Luton
Inspection number	10200524
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	401
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Sheridan
Interim head of school	Kerry Ward
Website	linden.thesharedlearningtrust.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	30 and 31 January 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The Linden Academy is a larger-than-average primary school.
- In 2012, the school joined the Barnfield Federation and then became a part of the Shared Learning Trust.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The trustees oversee Rising Stars, an out-of-school childcare provision, on the school site.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the interim head of school, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. Inspectors also met with trust leaders, including the executive principal, the chief executive officer and the chief operating officer.

- Inspectors met with five members of the board of trustees, including the chair of the board.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, French, science and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding leader and other staff to discuss safeguarding.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation during the inspection, including curriculum plans, school development plans, remote learning monitoring, safeguarding records and behaviour records.
- Inspectors considered 31 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 26 free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the 23 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences of school life and their learning in lessons to understand what it is like to be a pupil in their school. Inspectors also observed the behaviour of pupils across the school site.

Inspection team

Kristian Hewitt, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lesley Stevens	Ofsted Inspector
Cindy Impey	Her Majesty's Inspector
Marc White	Her Majesty's Inspector

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