

New Line Learning Academy

Boughton Lane, Maidstone, Kent ME15 9QL

Inspection dates

10–11 October 2017

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, weaknesses in leadership and governance led to a decline in the standards of learning and behaviour.
- In the last year, new leaders have halted the decline and the school is improving. Nevertheless, weaknesses remain.
- Leaders do not have the quality of information they need to gain an accurate understanding of the school's performance and the impact of their work. Leaders and staff have not been held sufficiently to account.
- Although improved, assessment information is not consistently accurate. Leaders do not yet have a clear understanding of the achievement of each group of pupils in each subject and year.
- Leaders and governors have a limited understanding of the effectiveness of their use of additional funding.
- Teaching is improving, but is still too variable to enable pupils to make consistently good progress.
- Some teachers do not take sufficient account of pupils' differing starting points. The most able are often not sufficiently stretched. At times, less able pupils struggle with work that is too hard.
- Teachers typically do not use questioning to check pupils' understanding and enable deep learning well enough.
- Pupils are not consistently receiving the guidance and support they need to improve.
- Teaching in mathematics provides limited opportunities for pupils to develop reasoning and problem-solving skills.
- Despite improvements, pupils' achievement is still too variable and boys in key stage 4, in particular, often have considerable gaps in their learning.
- Levels of absence and exclusion have increased considerably in recent years. Leaders have successfully halted this trend and the situation is improving. However, rates of absence and exclusion are still too high.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher is working effectively to improve the school.
- Behaviour is much improved, lessons are increasingly calm and purposeful.
- Pupils feel safe and well cared for.
- Leaders are making effective use of external support from a national leader of education (NLE) and her team from an outstanding school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so pupils make consistently good progress across the subjects they study, by:
 - further developing assessment so that teachers in all subjects gain an accurate understanding of the skills and knowledge pupils have grasped and where further teaching is needed to ensure good progress
 - making sure that teachers use assessment information routinely well, so teaching is at a consistently suitable level of challenge for pupils of differing abilities
 - developing teachers' use of questioning so they check pupils' understanding and help pupils overcome misconceptions and acquire deep learning
 - ensuring that pupils consistently receive the guidance and support needed to access the task at hand, so they understand where they have gone wrong and how to improve
 - providing sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills.
- Ensure that recently introduced initiatives to improve attendance and reduce exclusion lead to sustained improvements for all groups of pupils.
- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - developing the quality of performance information so that the trust, governors and leaders have a consistently accurate understanding of all aspects of the school's performance
 - using performance information effectively so that leaders and staff are held tightly to account for the achievement, attendance and behaviour of pupils and groups of pupils they are responsible for, in each year and subject
 - ensuring that leaders and governors know whether or not additional funding is used effectively, so they can hold leaders to account by making sure that the needs of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are met consistently well.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, weak leadership and governance have resulted in a decline in the school's effectiveness. The new headteacher together with his senior team are working effectively with the staff team to turn the school around. However, many initiatives are new and there are still areas of significant weakness to be tackled.
- Leaders do not have a consistently precise understanding of the school's performance. As a result, leaders are not well placed to hold staff tightly to account for their work.
- Senior leaders have set out a suitable approach to identifying what pupils with different starting points should achieve in each year and subject. However, some subject leaders have not applied this approach well enough to gain an accurate picture of pupils' gains in skills and knowledge. Consequently, senior leaders do not have a clear enough understanding of pupils' achievement across the school.
- Leaders spend additional funding on a range of support for disadvantaged pupils, those in Year 7 who need to catch up and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, leaders have not established a suitable approach to assessing and evaluating the quality of the support provided.
- This is particularly an issue for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those supported by the additional resource provision. Over time, leaders have relied too much on anecdotal information when reviewing the progress of these pupils. The new leadership team has started to remedy the situation, introducing proven methods for assessment of pupils' starting points. However, it is too soon to see the impact of this.
- Senior leaders' self-evaluation is broadly accurate. They know where the most pressing needs for improvement are. Leaders' action plans are suitably focused on these. However, leaders do not have a consistently sharp understanding of the starting points for their work. They are not well placed to evaluate the success of their plans at key points in time.
- The headteacher in his current role and in his role as deputy headteacher last year, has worked effectively to get to grips with the school's weaknesses. Leaders have set up and started to embed the systems and structures needed to ensure a smooth running and effective school. The impact of this approach is clearly evidenced in the calm, purposeful school environment.
- Most members of the senior leadership team have only recently taken up post. These leaders are 'stepping up to the plate', responding well to the responsibilities placed upon them. Their approach and manner exemplify the high standards set by the headteacher. Leaders' positive relationships with pupils are helping promote these same high standards across the school.
- Leaders have raised expectations for behaviour and clamped down on slack attitudes. Pupils, staff and visitors to the school all report a marked change. Clear routines are now in place and typically followed well. The 'line up' every morning sends a clear message to pupils that they must be in correct uniform, properly equipped to learn. The introduction of an internal exclusion room is helping reverse the trend of

increasingly high rates of exclusion seen since the last inspection.

- Leaders have undertaken a robust overhaul of policies and procedures for tackling poor attendance. Phone call 'excuses' are no longer accepted. Parents of pupils absent for several days are called in to discuss the reasons for their children's poor attendance and find ways to improve it.
- A member of staff responsible for attendance is now making home visits when attendance is causing particular concern. Pupils are also being rewarded more frequently for good attendance. As a result, pupils' attendance is improving.
- Leaders have worked particularly effectively with pupils in Year 7. Those with poor attendance at primary school were picked up and supported right from the start. The attendance of these pupils has been high this term.
- Leaders' work to improve teaching is making a difference. The introduction of the school's 'Big 5', routines, engagement, assessment, questioning and progress, is helping. It has focused teachers' attention on the key features expected to be at the forefront of their teaching.
- Staff training on the 'Big 5' during the summer term has led to improvements in classroom practice. Leaders are creating an open culture which encourages teachers to learn and develop. Teachers' successes are celebrated and shared with others so the staff learn from good practice in the school.
- Leaders have set up suitable arrangements for checking teaching quality, making sure that teachers understand what is working well and where further improvement is needed. A suitable range of training and development opportunities for staff is underway. Appropriate staff performance management arrangements are now in place.
- The support from an NLE and her team has proved invaluable. Support for school leaders has helped create a sharp focus on improving teaching which has led to improvement. A rich range of further support is planned to help leaders consolidate and build on the initial success.
- Leaders have adjusted the curriculum to improve its breadth and balance. Pupils in Year 10 now typically study two science GCSEs and have sufficient time to study these. Previously, many pupils only studied one science GCSE. Leaders have also adjusted the time allocated to design and technology and the arts at key stage 3, increasing the opportunity for pupils to make good progress in these subjects. The new timetable also includes more double lessons to ensure sufficient time for pupils to complete practical activities in subjects such as cookery.
- Leaders have introduced a more bespoke curriculum for pupils who need extra support. Year 7 pupils likely to find the transition from primary school particularly challenging are taught core subjects and humanities together by a primary expert in the 'endeavour group'. When ready, they can move into mainstream lessons. Pupils who need considerable support to catch up from previous underachievement attend 'Pitstop', an intensive 12-week catch-up programme.
- The curriculum provides well for pupils' broader development and life in modern Britain. Assemblies and tutor times provide helpful opportunities for pupils to reflect and learn about topics such as respect and equality. This aids pupils' understanding of their responsibilities as young citizens. For example, during the inspection pupils

attending assembly heard about the way the imam at the Finsbury Park Mosque intervened to uphold the rule of law in the wake of last summer's terrorist attack.

- Pupils benefit from a range of after-school clubs including in sports, art and drama. Pupils were keen to tell the inspectors about rehearsals currently underway for a pantomime they will be performing at the primary school next door.

Governance of the school

- Following the last inspection, the trust and its governors presided over a decline in the school's performance. Trust leaders took insufficient action to improve the situation. Leaders' self-evaluations indicate that until recently the standards of teaching and behaviour at the school were unacceptably low.
- In the last year, following the arrival of the current chief executive officer (CEO), sweeping changes in the school's leadership have led to much-needed improvements.
- The trust has secured formal support from another school. This has helped ensure that current school leaders receive the support and challenge needed to improve the school.
- Trust leaders and governors are gleaning more information about the school's performance than was previously the case. External reviews, such as those looking at provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and regular meetings between the CEO and school leaders have provided trust leaders and governors with more insight. However, despite these improvements, governors still do not have sufficient understanding of the school's performance, including the use of additional funding. As a result, they are not holding leaders firmly to account.
- The recent appointment of a new chair of the school's governing body, an experienced educational professional, has brought a much sharper focus. He has a clear understanding of the challenges ahead and what needs to change.
- The trust has recently set up a 'challenge team'. This includes the recently appointed trust officer responsible for performance information who is working with the school's leaders to improve the way they capture, analyse and report school performance. However, it is too soon to see the impact of this new approach.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders make sure that records are detailed and of high quality. Checks on the suitability of staff are comprehensive. Staff are alert to any sign that a pupil may be at risk. Staff know the importance of referring and how to refer any concern swiftly on to the leaders responsible for safeguarding. These leaders make sure suitable support is put in place for any pupil who is vulnerable or in danger of harm. This includes work with families and appropriate referrals and work with social services and other outside agencies. Leaders meet frequently to review the support provided to make sure it is meeting the pupil's needs.
- Activities in tutor time and assembly help pupils learn to stay safe online and in the real world. The banning of mobile phones since the start of this term has helped reduce incidents of pupils making inappropriate use of social media during the school day.
- The site is a well maintained safe environment. The introduction of a one-way route for cars has created a car-free entrance area where pupils can arrive and leave more

safely than before.

- The trust ensures that safeguarding arrangements are in order through regular checks and helpful external reviews.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching does not cater well enough for pupils of differing abilities. The tasks teachers set are often too easy or too hard for some pupils. In the worst cases, the work is too easy for all the pupils in the class. As a result, pupils' progress is typically inconsistent and sometimes low.
- Teachers' skills in assessing pupils' learning are not routinely effective. Teachers do not have a consistently clear understanding of what pupils already know and can do. Teachers often do not take pupils' starting points into account well enough when planning lesson activities.
- Typically, teachers' use of questioning to check pupils' understanding and elicit deep thinking is limited. This is particularly the case when teachers are explaining concepts to the whole class and trying to check how well pupils have grasped these.
- Often, teachers are not drawing the whole class in. Although pupils usually show respect and most pay attention, few get involved in the discussion or are called on to contribute. Consequently, teachers do not have a clear enough understanding of which pupils need to move on and which need further help. Pupils often do not gain a deep insight into the concept being explained.
- Teachers are not routinely providing pupils with the support and guidance they need to understand where they have gone wrong and to make improvements. Some teachers do not notice quickly enough when pupils are stuck or give them the help needed to overcome misconceptions.
- Some teachers are not providing the support and resources needed to help lower-ability pupils and those who have special educational needs access the tasks set and make good progress. More positively, inspectors saw some examples of very effective support being provided to such pupils in English and mathematics catch-up sessions.
- Leaders' work to set out what pupils should achieve in each subject and year based on their starting points and how this will be assessed is supporting improvements in teaching. In subjects where this has been done thoroughly and precisely, such as English, teachers are gaining an increasingly clear understanding of pupils' achievement. This is helping teachers plan more effective lessons than previously. However, this is not consistently the case in other subjects.
- In some subjects, such as science and design and technology, leaders have only identified the level of skill pupils should acquire in each year. The extent and depth of subject knowledge that pupils should gain relating to their age and ability and how this will be assessed has not been made clear. Consequently, teaching is not consistently well focused on enabling pupils to make significant strides in their acquisition of subject knowledge.
- Teaching in mathematics is typically not well focused on helping pupils to develop and apply mathematical reasoning skills to solve problems and deepen their understanding

of mathematics.

- Teaching is improving. Increasingly, classrooms are calm environments where pupils pay attention and make an effort. Pupils reported that this is a notable improvement and usually they can learn better than was previously the case.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Although the situation is improving, too many pupils are disadvantaged by poor attendance; this hampers their personal development. The high rate of external exclusion contributes significantly to pupils' poor attendance records.
- During the last few months, leaders have successfully halted the previous trend of increasingly high levels of absence and exclusion and attendance has started to improve. So far, this term, levels of exclusion and absence are notably lower than for the same period last year.
- The introduction of the 'Gateway' to provide intensive individual support for those pupils most at risk of permanent exclusion is a well-considered step. So far, the pupils attending are engaging well with this provision. However, it is too soon to evaluate the impact this will have on pupils' development and welfare in the longer term.
- Pupils learn the importance of treating all with respect, regardless of difference. They are clear that name-calling and prejudicial language is not acceptable. Pupils feel safe and well cared for. They have confidence in staff to help them resolve any issue of concern. Pupils reported that incidents of bullying are uncommon and when such incidents do occur they are dealt with well.
- Pupils have a well-developed understanding of how to keep safe and healthy. They are aware of the potential risks of using social media and how to keep safe online. Sessions on such things as road safety help pupils learn to keep safe in the real world. Cookery lessons help pupils develop a sound understanding of what makes a healthy, balanced diet.
- Leaders make suitable checks on the progress and welfare of pupils who attend alternative provision, including monitoring the attendance of these pupils on a daily basis.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Behaviour has improved notably in the last few months. However, pupils reported that although low-level disruption in lessons happens much less than was previously the case, at times it still gets in the way of learning.
- Some pupils have not adjusted well enough to leaders' higher expectations. Although incidents of poor behaviour that lead to exclusion are reducing notably, the proportion

of pupils receiving one or more fixed-term exclusion is still too high.

- Leaders' work over the last few months to set clear expectations and stress the importance of engagement in lessons is reaping rewards. In class, pupils typically follow routines and engage in the activities set. One pupil reflected this improvement stating, 'The difference this term is that I can learn.'
- Leaders use the 'line up' at the start of each day to check that pupils are suitably dressed and equipped; this is helping reinforce school expectations. The message is getting through. Pupils wear their uniform smartly and correctly and come equipped for lessons.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school site is typically calm and orderly. Pupils are polite and respectful to staff and respond to instructions when needed. Routines are well understood and followed. At lunchtime, pupils socialise happily together in the canteen and outside space. The school and grounds are well maintained; there is no litter to be seen.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement in each year group and across the subjects they study is too variable. Current pupils and particularly those at key stage 3 are typically making better progress than was previously the case in most subjects. Nevertheless, they are not achieving consistently well. Additionally, pupils often have considerable gaps in their skills and knowledge, resulting from a legacy of previous underachievement. Older boys in particular have considerable ground to make up.
- Although improving, teaching is not routinely meeting the needs of pupils of differing abilities well enough. The most able are often not receiving work that stretches and challenges them enough to make strong progress. Pupils with low starting points are not consistently getting the help needed to access the tasks set and learn well.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities typically make the same varied progress as their peers. Some additional funding has been used effectively to help pupils make better progress than would otherwise have been the case. However, leaders' use of funding has not been effective enough to enable disadvantaged pupils to make consistently good progress.
- In recent years, considerable weaknesses in teaching and declining levels of attendance have led to pupils' achievement at the end of key stage 4 being very low in relation to pupils nationally.
- Over the last year, leaders' concerted efforts to provide better teaching and support for pupils in Year 11 have made a difference. Provisional information indicates that pupils' overall achievement at the end of key stage 4 in 2017 across their best eight subjects, although still lower than the national average, was a clear improvement on the very low achievement seen by Year 11 pupils in 2016. The progress of disadvantaged pupils improved similarly.
- At the end of key stage 4 in 2017, pupils also achieved notably better in mathematics than in the previous year. However, current pupils' progress in the development of reasoning and problem-solving skills is hampered by a lack of focus on these aspects in

mathematics teaching.

School details

Unique reference number	135372
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10021143

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	570
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Marilyn Hodges
Headteacher	Paul Murphy
Telephone number	01622 743286
Website	www.futureschoolstrust.com
Email address	officenll@futureschoolstrust.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- New Line Learning Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school is a member of the Future Schools Trust. The trust includes another secondary academy, where all sixth-form provision is managed, a primary school and a nursery.
- A new CEO joined the trust in the autumn of 2016. A new chair of the school's governing body was appointed in the summer of 2017.
- The previous headteacher left in the autumn of 2016. An interim headteacher took up post for the rest of the academic year. The current headteacher joined the school as an interim deputy headteacher in January 2017. He was appointed as headteacher in the summer term and took up the post at the start of this term, September 2017.
- Several senior leaders left in the autumn of 2016. A new senior team is now in place. A vacancy remains for a deputy headteacher. This post is currently being filled by an acting deputy headteacher.

- Nearly half the staff in place at the time of the last inspection have since left. This has resulted in a number of vacancies and considerable use of supply teachers. The school has been fully staffed since the start of this autumn term.
- The school is receiving formal support from the Every Child Everyday Academy Trust. This support is led by the CEO and the executive headteacher of the trust who is an NLE.
- Approximately nine in every 10 pupils is White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language is in line with the national average.
- Almost half of pupils in the school are disadvantaged. This is much higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities without a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is much higher than average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is average.
- The school runs as special educational needs resource base with space for up to 12 pupils who have physical disabilities or visual impairment. The resource base currently supports three pupils: all have a full timetable of lessons in the mainstream school.
- A higher than national proportion of pupils join and leave the school at times other than the start of Year 7 and the end of Year 11.
- A few pupils attend alternative provision at Maidstone and Malling Alternative Provision, a pupil referral unit. The trust has just set up its own alternative provision on the school site, The Gateway. A small number of pupils currently attend this provision, on a part-time basis.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about special educational needs on its website.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about the curriculum, pupil premium and catch-up funding.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 38 lessons, seven tutor periods and an assembly. Most observations took place jointly with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work from a range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Inspectors held discussions with senior leaders and middle leaders. Discussions were also held with the chief executive of the trust and the chair of the governing body. The lead inspector also met with the NLE who is supporting the school. Inspectors spoke with teachers, support staff and pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed documents including safeguarding policies, behaviour and attendance records, self-evaluation and planning documents, and the school's records on teaching and learning.
- Account was taken of 85 staff-survey responses and 40 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, inspectors considered 27 parents' responses by free-text. There were no replies to Ofsted's online pupil survey.

Inspection team

Diana Choulerton, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alan Powell	Ofsted Inspector
Max McDonald-Taylor	Ofsted Inspector
Matthew Newberry	Her Majesty's Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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