

# The Link Academy

**Address:** Simms Lane, Netherton, Dudley, West Midlands, DY2 0PB

**Unique reference number (URN):** 144952

## Inspection report: 19 May 2026

|                    |                                                                                   |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Exceptional        |                                                                                   |
| Strong standard    |  |
| Expected standard  |  |
| Needs attention    |                                                                                   |
| Urgent improvement |                                                                                   |

### **Safeguarding standards met**

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

### **How we evaluate safeguarding**

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

## Strong standard ●

### Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the issues that some pupils face with attendance. They have created effective systems to ensure that pupils' attendance continues to improve. All staff know they have an important role in promoting high attendance. They work very well with pupils and their families to address any barriers to regular attendance. As a result, most pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged, have high attendance. Where this is not the case, the school's work is leading to notable improvements in these pupils' attendance.

Leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. They have established clear routines that pupils understand and follow. The school reinforces its high expectations by regularly rewarding pupils for their efforts and conduct. As a result of leaders' actions, the school is calm and orderly. Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. Lessons are purposeful. There are positive relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils are respectful of one another, and any form of discrimination is not tolerated. Bullying is rare, and when it does occur, the school addresses it swiftly and effectively. Pupils who struggle to meet the school's expectations receive highly effective personalised support which engages them well with education.

### Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders have ensured that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have their needs accurately and swiftly identified and assessed. Teachers receive detailed, useful information about how to meet the needs of these pupils. They use this information well to address barriers to learning. As a result, pupils with SEND access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers.

The school has developed highly effective partnerships with parents, carers and external agencies. For example, leaders proactively work with families, including through home visits and family support, to build trust and ensure that pupils with SEND receive the support they need to be successful. Provision for looked-after children is highly personalised. Leaders demonstrate flexibility and persistence to ensure that the academic and emotional needs of these pupils are met.

Leaders have an effective approach to supporting disadvantaged pupils. They ensure that these pupils' needs are considered in all that they do. As a result, disadvantaged pupils benefit fully from the school's provision. They achieve well, attend school regularly and take part in a range of experiences that enhance their education.

Leaders use alternative provision in pupils' best interests. They ensure that it supports pupils' academic and emotional needs.

## Leadership and governance

Strong standard 

Leaders at all levels are highly ambitious for the school and understand their role in its continued improvement. They have a precise understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The decisions they make are always in the best interests of pupils. They pay close attention to the experiences of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure they are successful at school. The actions leaders take are very effective in improving the school. They are taking robust and rapid action to improve the quality of teaching and achievement.

Those responsible for governance know the school and its context very well. They provide effective support and challenge to school leaders. They carry out their statutory duties rigorously. Furthermore, the trust has provided excellent support across key areas, including curriculum development, teaching and safeguarding.

Leaders have created a school where staff feel valued and appreciated. As a result, they are proud to work at the school and have great confidence in school leaders. They feel well supported with their workload and wellbeing. The school, with support from the trust, ensures that staff receive high-quality professional development opportunities to develop their expertise. Leaders plan this carefully and ensure that it precisely addresses the school's priorities.

The school works well with parents and carers. Leaders have established a parents' engagement group to listen to their views and involve them more in school life. Parents and carers have positive views about how well the school supports their children.

## Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard 

Leaders have developed a very well-thought-out programme for pupils' broader development. It is well matched to pupils' needs and prepares them well for their next steps. Furthermore, leaders have ensured that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) benefit fully from this programme. Pupils enjoy regular personal development lessons that cover important topics. For instance, pupils learn about the dangers of substance abuse, knife crime, healthy relationships, finances and the importance of eating healthily. Pupils know how to stay safe online.

The school provides meaningful opportunities for pupils to learn about fundamental British values and equality. For example, the annual culture week celebrates the different cultures in the school. This develops pupils' understanding of differences, enabling them to show respect for people from a range of backgrounds and religions. Pupils learn to be active citizens by being recognised for helping others at school and by taking part in charity fundraising events.

The school has ensured that pupils get the pastoral support they need. It provides carefully tailored support to effectively address any wellbeing issues pupils may have. Moreover, pupils know they have many caring staff members they can talk to if they have worries.

Leaders have carefully planned a range of trips that enhance the curriculum and give pupils opportunities they may not have experienced. For example, pupils visit safari parks, different

museums and local places of interest. Furthermore, leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils benefit from these trips.

Careers provision is a positive feature of the school. Leaders provide pupils with an extensive range of experiences that help them understand their options in education, training or employment. They visit local employers and colleges, have one-to-one careers advice, and learn about apprenticeships. Leaders prioritise pupils with SEND in this work so that they are extremely well-prepared for their next steps.

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## Expected standard

### Achievement

Expected standard 

The work that pupils produce, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged, shows that they typically have a secure understanding of the curriculum. Their responses in lessons also demonstrate they are developing their knowledge across the curriculum.

In key stage 3, pupils develop the important knowledge they need in reading, writing and number facts. This prepares them well for study at key stage 4 and enables them to access the full curriculum.

Pupils achieve in line with their peers nationally in many subjects in public examinations. Similarly, disadvantaged pupils achieve well in these examinations. Pupils with SEND progress well from their starting points. Leaders have addressed the issues in a few subjects where pupils have not achieved as highly as expected.

Pupils are well prepared for their next steps. They go on to appropriate education, training and employment.

### Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have ensured that there is a well-designed, logically sequenced curriculum in place that is ambitious and meets pupils' needs. Leaders have an accurate view of how well the curriculum is taught. They have set out how they expect teachers to deliver the curriculum and have provided them with high-quality training to support this. As a result, teachers typically deliver the curriculum well. They have secure subject knowledge and explain new learning clearly. They use appropriate activities and discussion to support pupils' learning. Generally, they effectively check pupils' understanding. However, at times, this is not done precisely enough to help them adapt their teaching to address learning gaps.

Most teaching uses the information and training received on how to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well, so that barriers to learning are addressed. As a result, pupils with SEND access the same curriculum as their peers.

Teachers ensure that pupils develop the essential knowledge needed for reading and writing. They explain new vocabulary effectively and use opportunities in lessons to develop

pupils' reading skills. Furthermore, pupils who need extra support with reading fluency and number facts get well-thought-out support.

## **What it's like to be a pupil at this school**

Pupils flourish at this ambitious and inclusive school. Teaching is typically effective in supporting pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to learn well. Generally, they achieve well in public examinations. Pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education, training or employment. The school has a very detailed understanding of the needs and learning barriers some pupils face. Staff understand these needs and barriers and typically address them effectively in lessons, enabling pupils with SEND to learn well.

Pupils have highly positive attitudes to learning. The school is calm and orderly. Pupils are respectful to other pupils and staff. They feel safe at school and know they can talk to staff if they have any concerns. Bullying is rare, and if it does occur, it is dealt with swiftly and effectively. Pupils attend school well.

Pupils at this school come from a range of backgrounds and cultures. The school ensures that pupils understand these differences through events such as culture week, where pupils celebrate the different cultures in the school and community. As a result, pupils are very respectful of others. They understand and respect each others' differences. This has created a harmonious school community where everyone feels accepted.

There are many opportunities for pupils to develop their talents and interests through a range of extra-curricular activities and experiences. Many pupils attend these, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. They enjoy attending the chess club, debate club and band and taking part in the school show. Pupils also have opportunities to develop their leadership and character. For example, they are proud to be on the school council and the student leadership team. Pupils also lead initiatives on attendance, cultural understanding, charity work and improving the school grounds.

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## **Next steps**

- Leaders should ensure that highly effective teaching is embedded in each subject, with teachers using assessment to precisely identify what and how to teach, and when.

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## **About this inspection**

This school is part of Dudley Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Jo Higgins, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Judith Humphry .

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMI.

Inspectors spoke with the principal, other senior leaders, trust leaders and those responsible for governance.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school currently makes use of 3 alternative provisions, including one that is unregistered.

Principal: Emma Edwards-Morgan

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**Lead inspector:**

Paul Halcro, His Majesty's Inspector

**Team inspectors:**

Philip Lloyd, Ofsted Inspector

Stewart Tait, Ofsted Inspector

Ed Leighton, Ofsted Inspector

Nazya Ghalib, Ofsted Inspector

## Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 19 May 2026

## School and pupil context

### Total pupils

**1,014**

Close to average

### What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

### **School capacity**

**1,050**

Close to average

### **What does this mean?**

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,154

### **Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)**

**50.89%**

Well above average

### **What does this mean?**

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

### **Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan**

**2.27%**

Close to average

### **What does this mean?**

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

### **Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support**

**17.85%**

Above average

**What does this mean?**

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

**Location deprivation**

**Well above average**

**What does this mean?**

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

**Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)**

**No resourced provision**

**What does this mean?**

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

**All pupils' performance**

**English and maths GCSE**

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

| Year            | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-----------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (final) | 32.8%       | 45.4%            | Below                          |
| 2023/24 (final) | 33.9%       | 45.9%            | Below                          |
| 2022/23 (final) | 32.5%       | 45.3%            | Below                          |

**Attainment 8**

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

| Year            | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-----------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (final) | 40.4        | 46.1             | Below                          |
| 2023/24 (final) | 39.8        | 45.9             | Below                          |
| 2022/23 (final) | 39.4        | 46.3             | Below                          |

## Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

| Year            | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-----------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2023/24 (final) | -0.02       | -0.03            | Close to average               |
| 2022/23 (final) | 0.06        | -0.03            | Close to average               |

## Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

### Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

| Year            | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-----------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (final) | 24.2%       | 25.8%            | Close to average               |
| 2023/24 (final) | 27.2%       | 25.8%            | Close to average               |
| 2022/23 (final) | 17.3%       | 25.2%            | Close to average               |

### Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

| Year            | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-----------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (final) | 39.5        | 34.9             | Close to average               |
| 2023/24 (final) | 35.3        | 34.6             | Close to average               |
| 2022/23 (final) | 33.6        | 35.0             | Close to average               |

### Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

| Year            | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-----------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2023/24 (final) | -0.53       | -0.57            | Close to average               |
| 2022/23 (final) | -0.48       | -0.57            | Close to average               |

### Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

### Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

| Year            | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|-----------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2024/25 (final) | 24.2%       | 53.1%                            | -29.0 pp                |
| 2023/24 (final) | 27.2%       | 53.1%                            | -26.0 pp                |
| 2022/23 (final) | 17.3%       | 52.4%                            | -35.1 pp                |

### Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

| Year            | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|-----------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2024/25 (final) | 39.5        | 50.4                             | -10.9                   |
| 2023/24 (final) | 35.3        | 50.0                             | -14.7                   |
| 2022/23 (final) | 33.6        | 50.3                             | -16.7                   |

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

| Year            | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|-----------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2023/24 (final) | -0.53       | 0.16                             | -0.69                   |
| 2022/23 (final) | -0.48       | 0.17                             | -0.65                   |

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

| Year                   | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|------------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2023 leavers (revised) | 80%         | 92%              | Below                          |
| 2022 leavers (revised) | 89%         | 93%              | Below                          |
| 2021 leavers (revised) | 91%         | 94%              | Average                        |

# Absence

## Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

| Year             | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (3 term) | 9.8%        | 8.4%             | Above                          |
| 2023/24 (3 term) | 11.1%       | 8.9%             | Above                          |
| 2022/23 (3 term) | 10.8%       | 9.0%             | Above                          |

## Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

| Year             | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (3 term) | 32.1%       | 23.4%            | Above                          |
| 2023/24 (3 term) | 34.2%       | 25.6%            | Above                          |
| 2022/23 (3 term) | 34.8%       | 26.5%            | Above                          |

# Our grades explained

## Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

## Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

## Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

## Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

## **Urgent improvement** ●

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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