

Link Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133741
Local Authority	Sutton
Inspection number	328744
Inspection date	18 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Kay Charlton

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	39
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs G Gray
Headteacher	Mrs B Dixon
Date of previous school inspection	23 February 2006
School address	138 Croydon Road Beddington Croydon Surrey CR0 4PG
Telephone number	020 8688 5239
Fax number	020 8667 0828

Age group	5–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Link Primary School is a non-maintained special school, one of two that are run by Link Day School Limited, a registered charity. It caters for pupils who have speech, language and social communication difficulties. Virtually all have associated learning difficulties and many are on the autistic spectrum. The range and complexity of pupils' needs has increased in recent years. All have a statement of special educational need. Most are of White British background and only a few speak English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Link Primary School continues to provide outstanding education, as was seen at the last inspection. The strong and determined leadership of the headteacher and senior staff ensures that the school's vision of 'making a difference to the lives of children with speech and language difficulties' is a reality. The school works very closely with parents who are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They make comments such as, 'I count my blessings every day that my son was able to get a place at The Link.'

Pupils' outstanding achievements are based on excellent teaching. Teachers and a wide range of onsite professionals, notably speech and language, occupational and music therapists, work together extremely effectively to tailor the provision to match the needs of individual pupils. They are meticulous in assessing pupils' progress and, as a result, they are able to be precise when planning the next small steps in each pupil's learning. They also use this detailed assessment to ensure that they intervene quickly if extra help is needed. All staff, including the school's strong team of support staff, use practical and 'sensory' approaches to learning very imaginatively to motivate pupils and ensure that their lessons are fun. The school's newly developed sensory garden provides ideal opportunities to support this way of working.

The very high-quality curriculum provides many creative opportunities for learning, for example in dance, drama, games, yoga and art. The programmes for English and mathematics are major strengths and, combined with excellent teaching, result in pupils' outstanding progress in developing their basic skills. An extensive programme of visitors to the school and an equally varied series of visits out enhance the quality of education, as well as pupils' enjoyment of school. Good use is made of play as a means of engaging younger pupils in learning. However, the school has rightly identified that there are insufficient opportunities for outdoor play to meet the increasing complexity of the pupils' needs in the youngest class. This is a key priority in its improvement plan.

Pupils thrive within the caring ethos and one parent likened the school to a second home. All make significant gains in their confidence and independence, and there is a harmonious working atmosphere. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and develop very positive attitudes to learning. Their behaviour is exemplary and, in part, this is because they are so keen to get their photograph in the 'Golden Book'. Staff place a strong emphasis on personal, health and social education and pupils learn to respect and value themselves and others. They learn how to be healthy and to keep themselves safe. They clearly value the school and this is evident through the excellent relationships they have with staff and each other.

The highly effective leadership has ensured that the school has made significant improvement since the last inspection. The senior team are rigorous in checking the effectiveness of provision and actively work alongside staff in classrooms giving advice and support as needed. Whole-school evaluation procedures are thorough and, as a result, the school is clear about the areas in need of improvement. The recent appointment of a member of staff with expertise related to children's learning in their early years, including children's play, is very timely. The governing body monitors the school's work robustly and acts very effectively as its 'critical friend'. The school's track record shows that it is extremely well placed to improve even further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the opportunities for outdoor play to fully meet the increasing complexity of pupils' needs in the youngest class.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils invariably reach or exceed their challenging targets. Although standards are well below those in mainstream schools, this represents excellent achievement and progress, given pupils' very low starting points on entry. A number of pupils have experienced difficulty in their previous educational settings, but all who join The Link School quickly show a determination to succeed. This is largely because of the clear targets they are set and the confidence they develop, based on a belief by staff that, 'every pupil can do really well once their needs have been carefully identified'. Pupils, including those for whom English is an additional language, develop the key skills of language, communication and numeracy extremely well and they learn to apply these skills very effectively across all areas of learning. Pupils' skills in information and communication technology are much improved since the last inspection and are now very good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The school has a strong commitment to being 'child-centred' and all aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral and social and cultural development are excellent. Pupils appreciate the friendly atmosphere and show good understanding of the importance of reflection as seen during daily 'moments of silence'. They learn to explore their feelings and empathise with others in need of help very well, for example when considering how they might help friends if they are sad. Pupils are very aware of the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle and are enthusiastic in the sporting activities such as football, horse riding and athletics. Throughout the school, pupils take on responsibilities very well, for instance in leading the class in early morning physical activities, and they learn to work as members of a team. They make a very effective contribution to both the school and the wider community. For instance, the school council recently revised the school's pupil questionnaire so that pupils' views can be better represented. Attendance is good. The overall figure is affected by a high number of medical appointments but the school makes every effort to encourage 100% attendance. The excellent development of pupils' basic skills, as well as their personal and social skills, means that they are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Staff have a wide range of expertise, particularly in helping pupils to develop their skills in language and communication. They work tirelessly to ensure that all pupils make the progress of which they are capable. They treat pupils with respect and consideration and value their every effort. In turn, pupils concentrate very well and try hard to do their best. Pupils respond exceptionally well to being involved in setting their own targets and in reviewing both their own and others' learning. The way in which they help to review aspects of their progress using digital photography is impressive. The work of teachers, professionals and support staff is very

carefully coordinated. This ensures a seamless provision for pupils so that everyone makes consistent use of specialist techniques such as signing. The whole team are enthusiastic, make learning fun and, where possible, provide 'first-hand' experiences that fully engage pupils. They make very good use of the school's high-quality resources.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school's curriculum is extremely effective. It is planned meticulously to take account of individual pupils' needs and it ensures that every opportunity is used to enhance pupils' personal development. The school's provision for the development of pupils' skills in language and communication is exceptional. A very wide range of enrichment activities gives an added dimension to the curriculum. These include visits, one of which is residential, and work with visitors, such as the British Heart Foundation and a recent winner of the Britain's Got Talent competition. The school already makes good use of early years practice in the ways that it organises play for the youngest pupils, as was seen when they pretended to be a space rocket that was being launched. An exciting development in the school's drive for continual improvement is to extend the opportunities for outdoor play for pupils in the youngest class.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care pupils receive is exemplary. There are thorough child protection procedures and safeguarding is robust. Staff make sure that all pupils, including any who arrive at different times, settle happily into school and feel confident about moving to the next stage of their education. It is noticeable how well staff listen to pupils and value their views, and the systems for supporting pupils' personal development are highly effective. There is comprehensive tracking of each pupil's academic progress and this information is used well to organise extra support for individuals. It is also used to set targets that the pupils are keen to reach. Parents are involved as partners in their child's education and the school works extremely well with them and with a wide range of professionals who give excellent support to pupils' development.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership is excellent overall. The headteacher leads by example and provides the vision and drive to ensure that all pupils reach their potential. Along with the senior team, she gives a very clear sense of direction. Together, they set a climate of strong teamwork among all adults so that everyone makes an active contribution to improvement. There are excellent procedures to support the professional development of all staff and this makes a significant contribution to sustaining pupils' excellent achievement. Governors provide very strong support to the school. They rigorously monitor the school's strengths and areas for development to ensure it provides excellent value for money. The school is highly effective in promoting community cohesion by ensuring pupils learn to value cultural and religious diversity. It is also very successful in raising the profile of those with speech and language difficulties and autism both locally and further afield, for example through pupils' participation in a gospel choir and in a national forum where their opinions are sought about how society might better meet their needs.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

30 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Link Primary School, Surrey, CR0 4PG

Thank you for all the help you gave me when I visited your school. You told me that you think that you are doing very well. You say that you have made friends, and that you enjoy all the extra activities, such as the residential visit to Macaroni Wood, swimming, horse riding and games. You told me that the staff are always ready listen to you and help you. I could also see that you are good at helping others and through the school council you make decisions that improve the school. The way in which you have helped to change the pupil questionnaire is a good example of this.

Link School is an excellent school where you do very well. Everyone helps you to improve your behaviour and helps you to gain confidence. Teaching is of a very high quality and, as a result, you make excellent progress. The way that many of you learn to speak is brilliant and your parents are extremely pleased about this.

The headteacher and all the staff are continually trying to improve your school even further. They have plans to improve outdoor play for the children in the youngest class. I agree that this is a really good next step. You can help to make sure that Link School continues to be excellent by doing always doing your best.

Yours faithfully

Kay Charlton

Lead Inspector