

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

INSPECTION REPORT

INSPECTION CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO SECTION 162A
OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2002

Name of school:	Linton Park
DCSF number: FOCUS number:	886/6106 507
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Mr Mike Thirkell Supporting Inspectors: Mrs Eileen McAndrew Mr Derek Coe Lay Inspector: Mr Doug Siderfin
Dates of inspection:	8 th – 11 th October 2007

CONTENTS OF THE REPORT

Section A: Introduction and summary

Section B: Compliance with regulations for registration

Section C: The quality of organisation and management

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Linton Park

Address of the school: 3 Eccleston Road, Maidstone,
Kent, ME15 6QN

Telephone number: 01622 356611

Fax number: 01622 356622

Proprietor: Medway Education Trust

Name of Chief Executive Officer: Mr Dean Bowie

Name of Senior Teacher: Mr C Allen

DCSF number: 886/6106

FOCUS number: 507

Type of school: Independent school affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

Age range of pupils and students: Year 7 to Year 13

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 53 Girls: 40
(Part time) Boys: 8 (Year 13) Girls: 7 (Year 13)

Number of post-16 students: Boys: 21 Girls: 16

Number of pupils with statements of special educational need:
Boys: 0 Girls: 0

Annual fees: No fees charged

Type of inspection: Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Inspection Team:

Reporting Inspector: Mr Mike Thirkell

Supporting Inspectors: Mrs Eileen McAndrew
Mr Derek Coe

Lay Inspector: Mr Douglas Siderfin

PART A: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection:

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service in accordance with Section 162(A)(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, and it follows the inspection framework laid down by the Service and the Focus Learning Trust and agreed with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). It was conducted by independent professional inspectors who looked at all aspects of the school's provision as required by the current regulations. The professional inspectors were accompanied by a trained lay inspector who looked at agreed aspects of the school's management and ethos and reported on these to the Focus Learning Trust. His findings are summarised in Section C of this document, but this section is not a statutory part of the inspection process.

Information about the school:

Linton Park is an independent school having special religious character, for boys and girls aged from 11 to 18 years. It is run by the Medway Education Trust which is affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust (FLT). Previously established as a study centre for children of the local Brethren community, it became a school in September 2005 when it moved to its present site following amalgamation with three other study centres formerly in Gillingham, Hastings and Tunbridge Wells. Following the successful launch, two more study centres in London and Bexley closed and their young people joined the school in Maidstone. The current buildings are providing temporary accommodation and the school will move to its new purpose-built premises in a semi-rural location on the edge of Maidstone in January 2008.

The school is run according to a clear ethos and principles established by the Focus School Community. Its mission statement included in the school prospectus emphasises that *'the Trustees of Linton Park are committed to the implementation and maintenance of education standards in line with their Christian ethos and government regulations. The school recognises the importance of providing all pupils with learning experiences that are challenging and match to their individual needs'*, with the aim of enabling *'every child, whatever their ability, to make steady progress and fulfil their potential'*.

Summary of main findings:

The school is justifiably proud of the developments since it was established. It already has many strengths and is meeting its aims successfully. The leadership of the school has a clear vision for future developments and is aware of the importance of establishing priorities. Pupils enjoy coming to the school. They make good progress and academic results achieved are commensurate. The school is seeking ways to further enhance pupils' academic attainment through the use of more sophisticated systems for monitoring and assessment. Pupils understand the importance of good behaviour and are developing social and communication skills that will serve them well

in their future lives. Relationships throughout the school are very good. The school meets all the current regulatory requirements.

What the school does well:

- it provides a good quality of education for its pupils;
- it has prepared an appropriate range of policies and its documentation is carefully considered and eminently usable;
- the school is well led and managed, with particularly good relationships between the trustees and educational professionals;
- the majority of its teaching is good and some is of a particularly high quality;
- its curriculum is broad and balanced and serves the abilities and aptitudes of pupils effectively; developments in the post-16 curriculum have been handled particularly well; and
- its staff show considerable goodwill towards the school and contribute significantly to the well-being of the pupils; the level of welfare and care provided is very good.

Next Steps:

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- to continue with the process of embedding school policies across the school;
- to further develop and improve procedures for monitoring and assessment; and
- to further develop the use of differentiated tasks in mixed ability teaching groups.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good. The school has given careful consideration to providing a curriculum which serves the abilities and aptitudes of pupils of all ages well. The broad and balanced curriculum effectively supports the pupils' academic, physical and creative development. It is taught within a five day timetable totalling 25 hours. Schemes of work are in place for all subjects. They are drawn from national guidance, Focus Learning documents, commercial materials and varying amounts of planning from individual teachers.

Pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 study all subjects of the National Curriculum except information technology (ICT). They are provided with opportunities to study French, food technology, textiles and resistant materials. Music is currently offered in Key Stage 3. They develop skills and competencies in key boarding (to be called word processing from January 2008), and broaden their knowledge through Bible Studies and citizenship. At Key Stage 4, pupils are prepared for a broad range of General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) level examinations suitable to their individual abilities and aptitudes.

An innovation in 2007 has been the introduction of a two-year post-16 course. The late decision by the FLT to implement Year 13 in the current academic year has resulted in the school having an interim curricular provision. In liaison with Orpington College it has, however, been possible to provide courses which will enable students to progress through a BTEC National Award in Business to the Certificate course and through AS into advanced level (A2) law. A new addition is the Chartered Institute of Management Accounting Certificate, Level 1. Also included in the Year 13 programme are Bible Studies, physical education (PE) and keyboarding.

The school has given careful thought to the sensible provision of an appropriate alternative strand of study for business education and related studies in Year 12. One strand leads to examinations which are essentially of an academic nature, whilst the second has a more marked vocational approach. The former prepares students for AS level in business studies, accounts, English and geography, with the intention that these develop into A2 in Year 13. The latter concentrates on the BTEC National Award in Business along with GCSE accounting and statistics and Pitman's Business English. The opportunity is also offered to some students to follow AS English. Included within the Year 12 programme for all students are Bible Studies, keyboarding, PE, current affairs and design technology.

Careers advice is provided for pupils within the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme and is thoughtfully designed to raise their awareness of the world of work and of employment beyond school. The programme is comprehensive and includes work experience, visits to commercial and industrial premises and individual

interviews with the school's careers co-ordinator. The adoption of the Employability Profile for pupils provides the basis for a particularly effective link between school and future employment.

The citizenship programme is well designed and is effective in raising pupils' awareness of issues relating to themselves and to others within their local and more distant communities. PSHE is delivered by year tutors in tutor time. The programme has been well received by pupils of compulsory school age.

In view of the extensive travel commitments between home and school, there is no extra-curricular programme of activities. Nevertheless, visits to local places of interest and for fieldwork in geography and business studies do take place. These provide pupils with valuable experiences, as well as the beneficial opportunity of being a member of a group. Resources are sufficient in most respects and their current limitations in business-related studies are being addressed. This will be further supported by resources being developed by FLT. The small library in the centre of the school is used comparatively little.

The quality of teaching and assessment

Teaching is of a good quality with significant strengths enabling pupils to make good progress. Teachers' subject knowledge in the majority of the lessons observed was good or very good, with particular strengths in business studies, science, English, French and textiles, contributing strongly to pupils' enthusiasm and willingness to become active participative learners.

Lesson planning is established and generally conscientious, but varies in quality, with some teachers noting what pupils will do rather than what they will learn. In the best lessons, learning objectives are clearly identified and shared with pupils. Teachers know their pupils' capabilities and use questions and answers effectively to extend learning for all and to challenge the most able to think for themselves. Similarly, teachers show sensitivity in identifying pupils' errors or misunderstandings, and in helping them to clarify their thinking through clear explanations. Teachers place an emphasis on pupils' learning and use the specialist vocabulary of the subject, as in a mathematics lesson involving problem solving and in work in textiles. In a small number of lessons where teaching is less good, pupils spend too long listening or engaged in insufficiently demanding tasks rather than making greater advances in their learning. Similarly, where planning was less precise, the pace of the lesson was dictated by the time pupils took to complete tasks rather than by the learning that needed to be covered.

The teaching of literacy has a high priority, and consequently pupils make good progress. Most lessons ensure opportunities for pupils to respond orally and to clarify their thinking in discussion. Teachers use a range of approaches, including humour, to help to keep the pupils' involvement and their motivation high. Some lessons make good links between subjects, as in history, geography and citizenship, encouraging pupils to apply what they know and, as a result, become more effective learners who enjoy their work.

Classes are of mixed ability, except in Year 12 where there are two strands, one academic and one vocational. In some lessons attention was paid to the different abilities and needs of pupils through differentiated questions but rarely through differentiated tasks. Most often all attempted the same task which more able pupils

could tackle while those less competent found it much more difficult. The school recognises that this is an area for development. Support for pupils with learning difficulties is well planned, and individual education plans are precise and targets manageable. Able, talented and gifted pupils are identified in lessons, but planning to meet their needs is at a very early stage of development.

The headmaster has begun to implement a programme to monitor teaching and learning. This initiative is central to the progress and further development of the school.

The written work in some pupils' books and files was too variable, with some work undated and presentation careless. Some pupils find loose leaf work difficult to manage so that work is often out of sequence and poorly organised, which makes effective revision difficult. Homework is given consistently and in the best examples, as in English in Year 12, builds on work covered in class, helping pupils to consolidate learning or practise skills.

In response to good teaching, pupils are willing to work at the tasks set and to contribute actively to their learning. Pupils are increasingly confident and articulate and do not hesitate to ask for help when they find something difficult. Where they have opportunities to work in pairs or groups they collaborate effectively, listening to each other, and, through sharing ideas, increase their joint knowledge and understanding. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, it was very clear that pupils enjoy school and feel they are making progress.

A clear policy for the marking of pupils' work has been established. However, in a review of pupils' work folders it was evident that some teachers have yet to adopt the requisite school guidelines. A significant number of folders contained no marked work, despite the work being in its fifth week. Others too frequently showed evidence of only cursory checking.

The school has developed an overarching scheme for assessment. Based upon nationally recognised tests, individual pupils' progress is measured against agreed targets to the next key stage. Steps are being made towards establishing a similar system of target setting and tracking of progress for post-16 students. Key Stage 3, GCSE and AS level results as well as outcomes in professional examinations are carefully analysed and then discussed by pupils with subject teachers. Year tutors have the responsibility for tracking the progress of their pupils across the full range of subjects. Parents receive a termly update on their child's progress either through the parent consultation opportunities or their reports.

Whilst the scheme for assessment, monitoring and reporting is still in its early stages, it shows evidence of being well conceived. It is already proving beneficial in those subject areas which have embedded the system in their working practices.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is generally good, although cultural aspects need to be developed further. The pupils' experience of being at Linton Park School enables them to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and

self-confidence through a range of opportunities, both through lessons and in other activities such as school visits. Spiritual development is well supported by the programme of Bible Study. The vast majority of responses from pre-inspection questionnaires completed by pupils confirmed that they enjoy being at the school. This was echoed by the positive response in parental questionnaires. Pupils enjoy their learning most when they are fully challenged by their work and activities. The school's aim of meeting the needs and aptitudes of all pupils through matching work carefully to their needs effectively supports the development of their self-confidence and self-esteem. Their developing self-confidence was illustrated by individual presentations by pupils to the whole class, for example in a Year 7 mathematics class and by students in a sixth form BTec Business lesson.

Pupils have a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong. The school sets appropriate expectations for the behaviour of its pupils and they respond well. Clear guidelines relating to these expectations are provided for both pupils and parents. Concerns raised about behaviour in a number of parental questionnaires were not borne out by observations during the inspection. Pupils learn about aspects of the law through a range of learning experiences, including PSHE and citizenship. The school is conscious of its responsibility in preparing pupils for their future well-being and for being a responsible and active member of their community. This includes how to conduct themselves in group activities and other social situations. The trustees have provided an effective link between the school and businesses within the community to reinforce and support this development. Pupils contribute to community life as a whole through collecting money for charities such as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.

Pupils gain a good knowledge of public institutions and services in England through the effective citizenship course. This is further reinforced by visits, such as that to the Palace of Westminster. Although pupils' cultural development is supported by subjects such as geography and history and by visits, the school guidelines are currently insufficient to support this aspect of their development.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The welfare, health and safety of pupils are given high priority in the school and provision is very good. Comprehensive and effective policies and procedures support and direct practice in relation to keeping pupils safe and provide clear guidance for all staff. Risk assessments are carried out for all activities involving pupils. Child protection procedures are in place and staff are familiar with them. Aspects of healthy living are encouraged through the curriculum in physical education, science and PSHE. These also contribute to pupils' knowledge and understanding of the dangers to health caused by smoking and illegal drugs. Food technology and work in science encourages healthy eating. Pupils trust staff to deal with any concerns they might have.

A clear policy and procedure for First Aid outlines safety measures, and most staff have had basic training. First Aid boxes are placed at strategic points around the school. Close attention is given to fire safety, and regular drills are carried out. Alarms and extinguishers are regularly inspected and maintained by specialist companies. There are good levels of adult supervision at all times.

Pastoral care and welfare is good for all pupils. There is a positive approach to behaviour and discipline, involving good behaviour cards and merit marks which contribute to good conduct.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

A clear set of procedures and practice informs all aspects of the recruitment of staff. Files are orderly and up-to-date. All essential checks on supply staff are carried out and guaranteed by the agency used by the school. The central register records all necessary information.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The current, temporary premises are suitable in all respects. They have been thoughtfully converted from former industrial premises. The school will move to new purpose-built premises in January 2008. The building is maintained in a bright and clean condition by conscientious cleaning staff. In general, good displays enhance the learning environment. The school is aware that the current provision for pupils who are ill is not ideal, although facilities have been carefully set aside which meet the requirement. There will be a purpose-built sick room in the new school buildings. Classroom furnishings are appropriate and the buildings are fully accessible. Suitable arrangements have been made to use nearby leisure facilities for PE.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The quality of information for parents

During the course of the year parents receive two written reports and attend one full parents' evening. It is not the practice of the school to provide regular newsletters home, but there is evidence that important information is suitably conveyed. Consultation with parents prior to the inspection showed that a significant number felt some degree of dissatisfaction with the level of communication that they had with the school. These concerns were not substantiated by the evidence available to inspectors. Nevertheless, the school is conscious of the need to maintain a regular channel of communication with parents. The school magazine, 'EduScene', performs a useful function in providing a link between school and home.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The school's complaints policy meets all requirements and is written in accessible language.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

This section is not a requirement of the Education Act 2002. The business organisation and management of the school were inspected by the Lay Inspector, who has written this section of the report.

The quality of the organisation and management of the school

The headmaster, staff and trustees of the school know exactly what is required of them and they fulfil their responsibilities well under the unobtrusive detailed management of the CEO. Each member respects the capacity of others so that the corporate whole operates smoothly.

Good delegation is particularly noticeable at all levels, including necessary sub-committees. Meetings in all departments and aspects of the school are held regularly and are minuted. Examples include meetings of the senior management team, the staff, and committees relating to finance, buildings and health and safety. There is good liaison between all aspects of the school management.

The headmaster has immediate control in each area of the school, but fits in well with the trustees and with Focus Learning Trust requirements. There is a fair proportion of full-time staff. Staff recruitment is organised and conducted thoroughly by two professional and two trustee interviewers. There is a full-time secretary. Cleaning is undertaken well by a local contractor.

Currently, the building of an entirely new school is taking place in three acres of land a few miles south of Maidstone. The new buildings will be capable of housing up to 200 pupils, including primary aged children, in first-class accommodation with all necessary amenities. It is expected that it will be ready for next term.

The whole organisation and atmosphere in the school is above average.

This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust. Further copies of the report are available from the Operations Manager of the Focus Learning Trust, Siskin House, Siskin Drive, Coventry, or from the Focus Learning Trust website:

www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk