

The Libra School

Independent school standard inspection report

DfE registration number	933/6202
Unique Reference Number (URN)	133392
Inspection number	386906
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2012
Reporting inspector	Mick Megee

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

The Libra School is an independent day special school located in a rural location on the edge of Exmoor in Devon. Almost all pupils are looked after and are in the care of the proprietor, Blackford Education (Schools) Limited, which operates several local children's homes that are open 52 weeks a year. The school, which opened in 2001, provides education for 38 weeks a year for pupils who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school is registered for up to 15 pupils aged between 5 and 18 years, although at the time of this inspection there were 8 pupils on roll, aged between 8 and 16 years. Seven pupils have a statement of special educational needs specifying behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, alongside other associated difficulties such as learning difficulties, medical conditions and autism. Prior to attending this school, many pupils have been out of formal education for significant periods. Pupils are referred by local authorities in the south of England. The school's aim is to develop its pupils 'to their full potential academically, creatively, socially, physically and emotionally in a happy, supportive, caring and disciplined environment.' The last inspection of the school was in November 2008.

Evaluation of the school

The Libra School provides a good quality of education and meets its aims effectively. Good teaching and a good curriculum ensure that pupils make good progress in their learning. Arrangements for the personal development of pupils are good as seen in their good behaviour. Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding and all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. The school has maintained the good standards noted at the time of its last inspection and has addressed effectively all of the suggested improvement points. It meets all of the regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good, and includes all of the required areas of learning. Suitable priority is given to the development of pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy, as well as a strong emphasis on physical and outdoor education. The curriculum is based firmly upon the National Curriculum and the demands of relevant external

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

accreditations and awards. Learning objectives and activities are customised to match the different needs and capabilities of the pupils through individual work schemes for each subject. All pupils have personal learning targets, based on their statements of special educational needs and written into effective individual education plans. However, pupils do not always know their targets because they are not always emphasised by teachers within lessons. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship are taught as a separate subject and, together with literacy and numeracy, also threaded throughout other subjects during the school day. In response to pupils struggling to complete academic homework at home, the school is trying out an after-school homework club so that pupils have access to a teacher each evening to assist where necessary. Pupils, parents and carers say that this has improved life at home to a considerable degree.

The range of learning experiences is interesting and broad, and pupils clearly like the activities, especially the practical ones. Pupils enjoy horticultural and environmental activities in the school grounds such as the planting of trees, pond dipping and looking after the chickens. Educational visits, such as to Stratford, Stonehenge, Dartmoor Prison and Silverstone, broaden pupils' cultural understanding and contribute well to their intellectual and social development. The school prepares pupils well for the future through suitable careers education, including the recent careers festival, and work-related activities such as visits to a cheese factory and visits from professionals such as veterinary nurses, firemen, accountants and lawyers. Such activities ensure pupils have a secure understanding of the world of work and public services in England.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. The school's new tracking system helps staff to identify pupils' progress accurately, so that they have an improving knowledge of what each pupil requires in order to learn most effectively. Teachers keep these requirements in mind when they plan activities in lessons. Most teachers set work at exactly the right level, but occasionally expectations are not quite high enough and the activities are too easy, which slows progress. In lessons, pupils are happy to explain their current activity, such as testing the permeability of different soils in science. There is usually a good pace to lessons as teachers introduce a planned sequence of activities carefully selected to motivate pupils. Teachers sensitively and flexibly change activities when interest and progress slow.

Relationships in the classroom are strong, and pupils respond positively and have good attitudes to their work. Most subjects are supported by a very good range of resources including laptop computers and interactive computer whiteboards. The resources for music and for a modern foreign language are satisfactory but not so strong, and these are identified as requiring improvement in the school's development plans. There is good teamwork among all members of staff, including members of the organisation's care homes who occasionally lend support in lessons, for example with new pupils. The school's Reading Support Unit provides specialist teaching and resources to pupils with very low literacy levels. With the high levels of personal support, the school effectively ensures that each pupil quickly recovers their confidence and enjoyment of learning.

The school has improved its assessment procedures since the last inspection. When pupils join the school, their levels of attainment are assessed by classroom staff to provide a baseline for the future assessment of their progress, using an appropriate commercial scheme that yields National Curriculum levels. The assessments are repeated six times a year, and the results are sent to parents and carers. Teachers hold grading meetings with staff from other schools to ensure that their judgements are accurate. A parallel assessment is carried out annually by an educational psychologist in order to provide further evidence of improvement. Opportunities for pupils to assess their own work are not yet embedded routinely into lessons to develop independence in learning, and not all teachers consistently make suggestions for further improvements when they give written or verbal feedback to pupils.

Pupils make good progress overall in their learning. Progress is strongest in physical education because of the wide range of physical activities undertaken, in reading where the school's Reading Support Unit provides specialist assistance, and in science where pupils have many opportunities for practical work, either outside in the grounds or in the science room. Pupils have access to a good range of external accreditation, up to and including GCSE, together with a number of modular qualifications. Current pupils are making good progress against their National Curriculum targets and are building portfolios of evidence towards their ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) and functional skills assessments. Several past pupils have achieved highly in their chosen careers, such as by being a member of the national youth basketball team.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. Pupils who join the school have a fractured and unhappy experience of learning in their previous schools. The school provides a hospitable and stable community in which effective learning takes place. A good range of educational visits and an effective PSHE programme help pupils to acquire a good appreciation and respect for their own and other cultures. In this way, pupils acquire tolerance and learn how to live and work in harmony with others, including those who are different from themselves. Pupils say that they feel safe and relaxed at school and that they get along with each other very well. Staff expect and achieve high standards of punctuality, attendance, attitudes to learning and behaviour, which are all good. Pupils say that they enjoy the atmosphere of the school and welcome their improving achievement. The positive relationships in the classroom mean that those who come with challenging behaviour make rapid improvement in managing their own behaviour. Pupils quickly come to trust and respect the staff, and this helps them rebuild their learning career and get back on track with their studies. Pupils say that they have someone to turn to if they are troubled. There is good liaison between the pupils' homes and the school and this has a good impact on developing life skills and preparing the pupils for the future. Pupils have many opportunities to make a positive contribution to the school and the local community, such as watering plants, tidying up and fundraising.

However, there is no pupil council or other means through which they can make known, as a group, their opinions on the decisions the school makes.

The use of contemporary examples of moral and personal issues from newspapers and the internet, coupled with practical experiences, helps build pupils' personal skills, self-esteem and confidence effectively through involving them in discussion and having the information to make choices. For example, good use is made of a virtual baby that replicates the demands of a real baby and teaches the reality of parenting. The school has a strict non-smoking policy, modelled well by staff and backed up by a similar one in the children's homes, that helps pupils who smoke to see that they can do without cigarettes and feel better for it.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school gives a very high priority to the welfare of pupils that ensures their readiness to learn. Day-to-day safety procedures are exemplary. Staff and pupils understand very well the policies and procedures for the management of behaviour and anti-bullying. Pupils are supervised individually by staff throughout the day, so that any emerging difficulties are identified early on and dealt with quickly and effectively. These measures ensure that the school community is always calm and orderly. There is excellent assessment of risk, including for regular off-site activities. Staff are fully aware, through frequent and regular training, of the school's child protection procedures which are implemented very effectively. Designated staff are appropriately trained to the required levels in child protection and first aid. The parent organisation implements safe recruitment checks in line with its effective policy and procedures. The premises are subject to regular, careful, professional risk assessment so that the accommodation is safe and well maintained. The school implements frequent and regular routine checks on all aspects of fire safety. It has ensured that all of the required written policies are in place, pay due regard to national guidance and are implemented effectively. The school fully meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school correctly checks all staff and others for their suitability to work with pupils and all of the required information is held on the school's single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school premises consist of a remodelled farm and surrounding buildings which have been suitably adapted for use as a school. The classrooms and other teaching spaces are of an appropriate size to ensure safe and effective learning. Pupils' work is displayed and celebrated in the communal areas. There are sufficient toilets, recreational spaces and offices to provide for the needs of staff and pupils. The school's outdoor space is extensive with attractive lawns and planted areas for play

and recreation. The pond, garden, greenhouse and chicken run enable pupils to take an active part in raising animals and growing trees, flowers and vegetables.

Provision of information

All of the required information is clear, accurate and up to date and is provided, or made available, to parents, carers and others. The parent organisation has a useful website with information about the school. Parents, carers and others receive regular updates on pupils' progress. Placing local authorities, parents and carers, who responded to the inspection questionnaire, comment positively on the provision made by the school, including its strong impact on the personal development of their children.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has an appropriate complaints procedure which meets regulatory requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, Schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

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

- ensure that pupils understand their short-term individual learning targets and ensure that they are referred to regularly in lessons
- ensure that pupils receive frequent, regular opportunities to assess the quality of their own work and the progress they have made
- ensure that teachers, when they give verbal and written feedback to pupils, state clearly the next steps pupils have to take in order to improve
- invite representative pupils to meet frequently and regularly with senior staff in order make their opinions known as a group and to be part of the school's decision-making.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Independent special school for pupils who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties		
Date school opened	2001		
Age range of pupils	5–18 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 7	Girls: 1	Total: 8
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 6	Girls: 0	Total: 6
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 6	Girls: 1	Total: 7
Annual fees (day pupils)	£78,000		
Address of school	Edgemoor Court South Radworthy South Molton Devon EX36 3LN		
Telephone number	01598 740044		
Email address	Enquiries@libraschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Joan E Wilkes		
Proprietor	Blackford Education (Schools) Limited		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

7 March 2012

Dear Pupils



Inspection of The Libra School, South Molton EX36 3LN

Thank you for welcoming me to your school. I enjoyed my visit very much, including the opportunity to speak with you about the school. The inspection judged that your school provides you with a good quality of education.

It was particularly pleasing to see:

- how well you behave both in and out of lessons
- that you feel happy and safe at school
- how well you get along with each other and the good respect you show your teachers
- the good progress you make in your subjects, especially in sports, reading and science
- the good job that your teachers are doing in helping you to succeed
- the very thorough steps the school takes to make sure you are safe and well.

I have asked the school to consider a few improvements. I have asked the staff to:

- make sure that you all know your individual targets so that you know what you have to work on
- give you plenty of chances to assess your own work
- make sure that, when you have completed your work, teachers tell you how to make it even better
- give you the chance to express your opinions formally on the way the school is run, for example through a pupil council. You said that this would be a good idea.

You can help your school to be even better by continuing your hard work and perhaps by volunteering to represent others on a pupil council.

With all best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mick Megee
Lead inspector