

# Learn 4 Life

Independent school standard inspection report

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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.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## Information about the school

Learn 4 Life School is registered to provide education for up to 16 students aged between 11 and 16 years with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Most students are in the care of local authorities; they live in children's homes owned and managed by Care Afloat Ltd who also own the school. The children's homes include a narrow boat where students are also educated for short periods. The company also makes use of a yacht for short placements of up to 28 days. The school has two main sites in Skelmersdale; a shared-use community centre and a sea cadet centre which are within walking distance of each other. There are seven students on roll at present, of whom three attend part-time and five have statements of special educational needs. The school opened in July 2005 and was last inspected in April 2009.

The school is committed to working closely with others and aims to ensure that students are able to take part in full-time education. The school states that, 'These aims are achieved by developing in students a sense of self confidence, equipping them with the skills to gain control in their lives, engendering an enjoyment of learning, promoting unconditional acceptance and enabling students to be included in their community.'

## Evaluation of the school

Learn 4 Life provides a good quality of education and is successful in moving students a long way towards achieving self-confidence and independence. The staff have an excellent understanding of the individual needs of students and their good teaching meets these needs. The school gives a high priority to students' welfare, and staff work closely with carers in the children's homes to make sure that everyone safeguards students effectively. Under the positive and visionary leadership of the headteacher, the school has made good progress since the last inspection and has well considered plans for future development. The school meets all but two of the regulations, both of which were unmet at the time of the last inspection and now require urgent attention.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents).

## Quality of education

The school's good curriculum provides the foundation for successful learning. Students enter the school with significant gaps in their basic skills, such as reading, writing and mathematics, as a result of previous time out of education and the challenges which they have faced in their personal lives. The school responds to these gaps by making sure that all students have regular lessons in these subjects. The teachers have a very good understanding of the needs of each individual student. This is because they find out what students know and can do as soon as they arrive at the school. They take good account of students' statements of special educational needs and prepare individual education and behaviour plans which include targets for improvement that are suitable for the individual student. Students in both Key Stages 3 and 4 study all the required subjects of the National Curriculum and have the opportunity to prepare for examinations at levels suited to their personal capabilities.

In Key Stage 4 students are able to take part in additional courses, often in different locations, which help to prepare them effectively to move on to college or in to employment. There are good opportunities for students to take part, for example, in motor mechanics, construction, hair and beauty, and taster courses at local colleges. A number of previous students have had success and gained certificates for their work in these and a number of additional areas. In addition, effective courses in food technology and information and communication technology (ICT) are taught at the school sites. Students who have found it particularly difficult to settle reliably into regular classroom teaching are given good opportunities to develop personal qualities in outdoor education at the school's mobile sites. Individual students have made good progress in their personal skills, while also achieving a range of relevant entry level qualifications. The school has a carefully managed approach to integrating students fully into the life of the school, which includes teachers working with individual students in their homes or at the mobile classrooms.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good and contributes effectively to the progress made by students. Teachers are very patient and considerate of the emotional difficulties experienced by students. They vary the approaches which they take to learning in the classroom and respond flexibly to the changing moods and behaviours of the students. As a result, students are mostly able to concentrate for sustained periods and to improve the quality of their work, often to levels which they did not previously believe possible. The staff work very effectively as a team, meeting at the end of each day to review the work and progress of each individual student. Each week the students' personal targets are reviewed and discussed with them individually, and timetables are adjusted to make sure that each student is able to experience success and to remain on track to achieve the qualifications for which they are studying. The majority of students respond positively to the range of opportunities provided. Individual teachers take responsibility for preparing lessons which are shared and sometimes taught by other staff. This allows for good flexibility in timetable arrangements but also places heavy demands on staff to develop their expertise across a range of subjects. There is not always sufficient training available

to make sure that teachers' confidence and expertise is developed to the required extent. Relationships between staff and students are good and students develop the confidence to draft and improve their work, to work diligently through practice examination questions and to discuss confidently in one-to-one situations with their teachers. While the teaching is largely successful in meeting the needs of students, there are some missed opportunities for more dynamic, fast-paced teaching, making use of vibrant visual resources to stimulate and accelerate students' learning.

The assessment of students' work is thorough and based on the developing use of National Curriculum levels, together with the marking requirements for external examinations. As a result of the good teaching, and regular advice about how to improve their work, students make satisfactory progress overall. Individual students make good progress in particular subjects, but for others progress is restricted as a result of irregular attendance or unwillingness to engage for a sustained period in their learning. Almost all of the students achieve examinations and awards which reflect their ability and level of commitment. A number of students have only been in the school for a short period of time, but have already shown good involvement and the determination to succeed.

## **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

Students make satisfactory progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. All of the students enter the school with a history of disrupted and often traumatic experiences of education and personal development. The staff are extremely sensitive to the challenges faced by students in turning their lives around. Excellent support is given, in cooperation with the students' homes, to make sure that students adopt safe and healthy lifestyles. The majority respond positively to the warm relationships established in the school and they recognise the good opportunities they have, despite any mistakes they may make, to be valued members of the school community. Students are encouraged to be reflective about their behaviour and to recognise the small steps to improvement that they are making. As a result, behaviour in school is satisfactory. For many students this represents a huge improvement in a relatively short period of time. The staff provide excellent role models of mutual respect, courtesy and willingness to listen. Students' attendance is variable and in a small number of cases restricts the extent of their progress in school. Staff keep very careful records of students' attendance and their engagement in lessons which are used continuously to develop strategies to support, challenge and encourage individual students to improve.

Good opportunities are provided for students to take part in trips and visits related to the curriculum. These also enable them to develop their social skills and their understanding of the services and facilities in the local and wider communities. Themes in the curriculum for personal, social and health education include knowledge of the legal system, democracy and an understanding of diverse cultures. Students are encouraged to develop tolerance and respect for diversity of lifestyles and cultures through learning about various world religions, cooking foods from different countries and considering the impact of world events; for some students

this is a slow journey to success. The majority of students develop positive attitudes, enjoy school and recognise the good opportunities which they are given.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The school's arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of students are good. The school works closely with the students' homes to make sure that their welfare and safety needs are understood and acted on consistently. All the required policy documents have been prepared to an exemplary standard, take good account of statutory guidance, and are reviewed regularly. Procedures for the management of behaviour, the prevention of bullying and for the safety of students, both on and off site, are carried out effectively by all staff. All staff are trained to the required levels in child protection, first aid and fire safety. Excellent records are kept to make sure that training is always up to date. The required checks on all aspects of premises and fire safety are completed and recorded regularly. Attendance and admission registers, together with records of any incidents, are recorded securely and used to inform decisions about teaching and the welfare of individual students.

## **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors**

All the required checks on the suitability of staff and proprietors are completed rigorously. Details of all these checks are maintained in a suitable single central register.

## **Premises and accommodation at the school**

The school is based at two sites, both of which provide suitable and safe premises for effective learning. Classrooms are of suitable size and present a welcoming and well maintained setting for teaching. There are good facilities for ICT and for food technology. Additional arrangements for a range of work-related courses are made at other sites. The Elmstead site, which has suitable classrooms, does not have sufficient toilets to meet the regulations. In addition, there is no suitable outside space for students' play and recreation.

## **Provision of information**

The school's prospectus gives a good introduction to the school. Some of the main policies, including details of the curriculum, are made clear. Parents and carers are made aware of the full range of policies which they may request from the school. Written reports, which are sent home at the end of each term, provide a detailed account of which subjects students have studied, the standards they have reached in their learning and the progress they are making in their personal development.

## **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school's policy and procedures for managing any complaints meet 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'), with the exception of those listed below.<sup>3</sup>

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises of and accommodation at schools (standards in part 5) and must:

- ensure that there are sufficient washrooms for staff and students at the Elmstead site (paragraph 23(j))
- make appropriate arrangements for providing outside space for students to play safely at the Elmstead site (paragraph 23(s)).

## **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 teachers have opportunities for regular training, particularly related to teaching a range of different subjects.
- Develop the structure of lessons to ensure that:
  - lessons proceed at a good pace with a variety of engaging activities
  - students have access to a range of vibrant visual resources, including electronic media.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made).

## 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

<b>School status</b>	Independent		
<b>Type of school</b>	Special day school for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties		
<b>Date school opened</b>	July 2005		
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16 years		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed		
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 2	Girls: 2	Total: 4
<b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 2	Girls: 1	Total: 3
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b>	Boys: 3	Girls: 2	Total: 5
<b>Number of pupils who are looked after</b>	Boys: 4	Girls: 3	Total: 7
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£29,700–£38,100		
<b>Address of school</b>	Quarry Bank Community Centre 364 Ormskirk Road Tanhouse Skelmersdale Lancashire WN8 9AL		
<b>Telephone number</b>	01695 558698		
<b>Email address</b>	Learn4life@careafloat.co.uk		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Elaine Booth		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Daniel Curran		

**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.**



6 December 2012

Dear Students

### **Inspection of Learn 4 Life School, Skelmersdale, WN8 9AL**

I would like to thank you for making me welcome when I visited your school recently. In particular, I am grateful for the time that some of you took to talk with me at the school or in your homes. The inspection judged that Learn 4 Life gives you a good quality of education and helps you to prepare successfully for college or employment in the future. I was pleased to hear that you believe you have made progress since you joined the school. For some of you this has been progress in your personal lives, being more willing now to take part in full-time education and improving your relationships with staff and other students. It was good to hear and see that some of you are making good use of the chance to take exams in GCSE or BTEC subjects.

Your teachers work very hard to make sure that you have the best possible opportunities to learn and to develop as responsible members of your community. It was good to see the positive relationships between students and staff. I recognise that a number of you enjoy and benefit from practical courses which help you prepare for future work in areas which interest you as well as improving your reading, writing and understanding of maths and science.

I have asked the staff to make sure that you learn in a variety of different ways so that you can all be successful with the examinations for which you are studying. I know that they make every effort to give you experience of work and training in areas which interest you.

You can play your part in helping to get the best out of school by making sure that you attend every lesson and continue to do your best to complete the work which is set for you, even when it is difficult. I would like to wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

David Young  
Lead Inspector