

Learning Opportunities Centre Secondary

Ringwould Road, Ringwould, Deal, Kent CT14 8DW

Inspection dates

5–7 June 2018

| Overall effectiveness | Requires improvement |
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| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Requires improvement |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Requires improvement |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Senior leaders and the proprietor have not ensured that the quality of education is good. Middle leaders do not have clear enough roles. The proprietor does not hold leaders well enough to account for pupils' progress.
- Teaching is not consistently good. Teachers do not make sufficiently clear to pupils what they should be learning.
- Although the school plans to work with other schools, currently staff have limited opportunities to develop their experience and skills. Teacher training in phonics is too limited.
- Staff do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. Assessment is not used well enough to set work that always matches pupils' needs.
- Pupils do not make consistently good progress. They do not have enough chances to practise their spelling, punctuation and handwriting skills across a range of subjects. They do not develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics well enough.
- Impartial careers advice is of variable quality. Work-experience provision is not extensive enough.

The school has the following strengths

- The school is a caring and supportive community. Pupils' personal development and well-being is good. Pupils often re-engage in their education. Parents and pupils say that this is due to the dedication of staff.
- All parents who responded to the Ofsted survey, Parent View, would recommend the school to another parent.
- Leadership is now fully in place and is beginning to have a positive impact. Leaders have introduced a varied curriculum which is designed to help pupils gain a range of accreditations.
- The school is now on a steadier footing. Leaders have ensured that the independent school standards have been met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - embedding the assessment system so that teachers use information about pupils' starting points to set work that matches pupils' needs
 - ensuring that the proprietor holds leaders fully to account for the progress that pupils are making
 - developing the role of middle leaders so that staff have clear roles and are held to account for the areas for which they are responsible
 - improving the quality of impartial careers advice and the amount of work-experience opportunities
 - making sure that staff have more opportunities to train in the teaching of phonics
 - implementing the school's plan to work with other similar schools to share good practice and enable staff to develop their skills.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils make good progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers have high expectations and always make clear to pupils the learning intention of activities
 - giving pupils more opportunities to practise their spelling, punctuation and handwriting skills across the curriculum
 - ensuring that pupils develop their reasoning and real-life problem-solving skills in mathematics.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- All of the independent standards have been met, but the school is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good school.
- Middle leadership roles are not yet well developed. Middle leaders are not held fully to account for the progress that pupils are making within their areas of responsibility. Some staff have not had enough training to fulfil their roles to the best of their abilities. For example, despite many pupils having low reading skills, there has been little staff training in phonics.
- School documentation shows that leaders recognise the need for staff to broaden the range of their experience. One of the ways identified is by working with other similar schools to ensure that staff share good practice and further develop their skills. As yet this has not been implemented.
- All pupils receive some careers advice. For example, they receive detailed information about careers in the army. However, the quality of the careers advice is variable. Work-experience provision is limited. The school is developing pupils' enterprise skills. For example, pupils grow vegetables to sell at the summer fair.
- Leadership has been through a period of upheaval. Until recently the headteacher was only working at the school three days a week. Leaders have introduced regular checks on teaching. This is starting to have an impact on the quality of education provided. School documentation now provides a clear plan of improvement. A new assessment system has been introduced. This is starting to have an impact on progress, especially in mathematics. Leaders are aware that the quality of teaching and pupils' progress need to improve further.
- The curriculum promotes British values effectively. The headteacher has ensured that it supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Activities focus on pupils' interests. The aim is to get pupils to re-engage in their learning. Pupils learn core skills in English and mathematics. There is a varied range of other subjects on offer such as design technology, art, motor mechanics and food technology.
- Pupils enjoy many sporting activities, such as badminton, football and circuit training. They enjoy taking part in five-a-side football tournaments.
- Parents and carers are very supportive of the school. All who responded to the Ofsted survey, Parent View, would recommend the school to another parent. One parent expressed the views of many when they said: 'My child has come on so far since starting at this school, his confidence is growing every day. Teaching staff are supportive and understanding of his needs.'
- Pupils who expressed an opinion said that they were happy at the school. They said that staff are kind and caring. They liked the small classes and felt that the teachers really understood them.

Governance

- The proprietor ensured that the school ran smoothly during the period of over a year when there was no headteacher. Aspects such as safeguarding and pupils' welfare were

well monitored. However, the proprietor acknowledges that the teaching and learning of pupils was not so carefully checked during that time. The proprietor recognises that they are not holding leaders fully to account for pupils' progress.

- The proprietor works at the school every day. She is well respected by pupils, parents and staff alike. Parents praise her commitment to pupils' well-being.
- The proprietor has ensured that all the necessary policies are in place. This includes the school's safeguarding policy, which is published on the school website. The website complies with all statutory requirements.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The culture of safeguarding is at the heart of the school's work. Pupils' safety is the highest priority. Staff have been well trained. Records show that staff are meticulous in recording any concerns, no matter how small. Written records are well organised.
- The school site is secure. There are clear procedures for checking visitors. Staff make sure of the safe arrival and departure of pupils each day.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is inconsistent across the school. Teachers do not always use information from the school's new assessment system well enough. They do not ensure that pupils make good progress.
- Teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils' learning. They often do not plan challenging tasks that are well matched to pupils' abilities. In some lessons pupils are unclear what they should be learning.
- Pupils do not consistently develop their skills in spelling, punctuation and handwriting. This affects the progress they are able to make across a range of subjects.
- In mathematics pupils rarely deepen their understanding by reasoning. They do not often practise real-life problem-solving skills. However, in other aspects of mathematics progress is improving. This is because leaders have helped teachers to give pupils the right level of work.
- Staff ensure that pupils develop their vocational and practical skills well. Lessons in life skills give pupils varied and valuable experiences. Staff provide effective support to those who are attending the alternative provision.
- Staff ensure that pupils move to the next stage of their education or training successfully. They work hard to heal pupils' sometimes fractured relationships with education.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. This is because staff help pupils to develop their self-confidence. Pupils learn to relish the new experiences on offer, such as going gliding with an instructor.

- The school tracks pupils' personal progress carefully. School records show clear evidence of improvements over time. Parents speak highly of staff. They comment on how well their children have grown in confidence since attending this school.
- Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. They know about dangers such as internet grooming and radicalisation. Pupils say that there is no bullying at the school. They say that if there was an incident, staff would deal with it quickly.
- There is a culture of friendly relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils say that they feel well cared for and valued. This has a positive impact on their self-esteem. Those on the school council consider that their views are listened to. For example, they have an influence on selecting the charity the school supports.
- Pupils who attend the alternative provision are making good progress. They attend regularly. This has helped them to make positive choices for their futures.
- Pupils develop their self-confidence through activities such as coasteering. Staff who run the forest school make sure that pupils develop strong social skills. For example, pupils develop their trust in one another when learning how to handle a saw safely.
- Therapeutic sessions provide a useful support to pupils who may be anxious.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school. Records show that incidents of poor behaviour decrease the longer a pupil is at the school.
- Pupils who spoke to the inspector said unanimously that they feel safe and happy in this school. Older pupils provide good role models for those who are younger. Pupils treat each other with respect. They show tolerance to those who hold different viewpoints to their own.
- Most pupils have had a history of below-average attendance before attending the school. Attendance often improves once they have been at the school for a while. Parents say that this is because their children want to come to this school.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils have not achieved as well as they could because the quality of teaching is too variable. Many start school with significant gaps in their learning due to disrupted education. Until recently the school was not checking where these gaps were. Pupils were often given work that they found either too easy or too hard. Leaders have started to address this issue. Work provided is beginning to be more challenging, particularly in mathematics.
- Progress in writing is often variable. This is because pupils do not get enough chances to write in different subjects. For example, pupils write very little in science.
- Those at an early stage of acquiring reading skills do not always make strong progress. This is because they often do not apply phonics skills to sound out words they do not know. Those who have greater skills in reading often make stronger progress. Many can talk about the characters in the books they are reading or predict what will happen next

in the text.

- Pupils make strong progress in design technology. They have made interesting models, such as the control centre of Dr Who's 'Tardis'. Some pupils have made impressive outdoor furniture out of pallets.
- Pupils enjoy developing their skills in art. They have strong drawing skills. Many have produced imaginative models based on the topic they are studying. Those who are most able have created work which shows talent and skill.
- The school ensures that pupils engage in sports that interest them. They develop competent skills in sports such as horse riding. Pupils like participating in inter-school sports competitions. They enjoy the opportunity to develop their skills in track and field events.
- Pupils develop effective skills in French. Many said that they enjoyed the French-themed day where they had the opportunity to speak French and learn about French culture.
- In 2017 pupils gained a range of accreditations from entry level to level 2. Some pupils gained GCSEs in mathematics and physical education. Those who attend the alternative provision are successful in gaining further accreditations.
- All pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training. They go on to study subjects such as land management, information technology and health and beauty.
- The school keeps in contact with pupils who have left the school. It provides support to any who need it. About 98% of past pupils are in education, training or employment. Some past pupils have secured places at university.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 119013 |
| DfE registration number | 886/6063 |
| Inspection number | 10006325 |

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

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| Type of school | Other independent special school |
| School category | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 10 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 26 |
| Proprietor | Lesley Buss |
| Headteacher | Simon Graydon |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £30,052 to £57,550 |
| Telephone number | 01304 381 906 |
| Website | www.learningopps.org |
| Email address | simong@learningopps.org |
| Date of previous inspection | 15–16 May 2012 |

Information about this school

- Learning Opportunities Centre Secondary is an independent day school. It opened in 1991. It is situated on two sites. The main school is located at Ringwold. The second site is at The Street, Womenswold. It is about a 20-minute drive between the two locations.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. The majority have needs associated with social, emotional and mental health issues. Some have additional difficulties relating to autism and anxiety.
- The school currently provides full-time education for 26 pupils between the ages of 10 and 19 years of age. There are currently too few pupils in the sixth form to report on their outcomes without them being identified. Many pupils enter and leave the school at different times. For example, nearly a third of the pupils arrived in the last academic year.
- The school works with a range of agencies, including health and social care professionals

and educational psychologists. Approximately four local authorities use the school to place pupils.

- The school currently offers a range of accreditations from entry level to level 2. These include functional skills, BTEC National Diploma and GCSEs.
- Since the time of the previous inspection, the current headteacher worked away from school for over a year. During that time the proprietor took over the running of the school. The headteacher returned in September 2017, working three days a week. He became full time a month ago. A deputy headteacher started at the school a month ago.
- The school's aims are to 'provide a happy and comfortable school where pupils reach their full potential'.
- The school uses one alternative provider called East Kent College, which is situated in Broadstairs.
- At the time of the previous standard inspection in May 2012 the school was judged to be good. It met the independent school standards.
- The school has no religious affiliation.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning across the school, often jointly with senior leaders. The inspector heard pupils read and looked at their work in a range of subjects.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, pupils and staff. There was a meeting with the proprietor. The inspector took account of the 15 responses to the staff questionnaires.
- There were 11 responses to Ofsted's parent questionnaire, Parent View. There were also meetings with two parents.
- The inspector visited both school sites and reported on the suitability of the accommodation. There was also a visit to the forest school, which took place at a nearby campsite.
- The inspector checked documents, including teachers' planning, and information about pupils' progress. School policies relating to safeguarding, attendance and behaviour were checked to ensure compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Liz Bowes, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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