

# Blackford Education (Schools) Ltd t/a the Libra School

**Inspection date**

17 May 2023

**Overall outcome**

**The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented**

## Main inspection findings

### Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

#### *Paragraph 7*

- The school has robust arrangements in place to safeguard the welfare of pupils at the school. The designated safeguarding lead is supported by a wider safeguarding team. There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Pupils know that they can talk to any adult should they have a concern.
- The school has a comprehensive safeguarding policy which complies with current government guidance. Staff receive a detailed safeguarding induction and, in addition, benefit from online and live training.
- Directors are kept closely informed about all safeguarding matters. The relevant local authority is informed on the rare occasions on which physical intervention is necessary. Pupils understand that physical interventions are occasionally used to keep them or others safe.

#### *Paragraphs 11, 12, 14, 16*

- Leaders and staff implement well-considered health and safety policies relating to the curriculum and the premises with rigour. All staff take their responsibilities in this area seriously. Pupils are also taught that they have a key role in ensuring that the school is safe.
- Leaders give fire safety an appropriately high priority. Weekly fire alarm tests are recorded and sufficient fire extinguishers of appropriate types, as well as fire blankets, are to hand. These are checked and serviced annually. Planned fire drills are held at least three times each year.
- Pupils are very well supervised by trained staff. The directors have plans to augment the staff further should the material change be approved.
- Risk is very carefully considered across all the school's activities, from contact with animals on the farm to the use of an axe or a saw during lessons and enjoying a campfire. One of the directors approves every risk assessment. The school has a good

appetite for risk, which enables all pupils to have a rounded, enjoyable and memorable education.

- The school is likely to meet the independent school standards in this part if it receives approval for the implementation of the material change.

#### Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

##### *Paragraphs 17–21*

- Leaders have a thorough understanding of safer recruitment procedures. Their checks go beyond requirements. Leaders are rigorous about checking gaps in applicants' career history, to the extent of requiring applicants to provide extra referees.
- All staff are required to sign up for the Disclosure and Barring Service, and leaders check annually the record of every member of staff to ensure that they remain suitable to work with children. The school does not employ supply or agency staff, but should it become necessary to do so, would use the same thorough procedures that are currently in place to check suitability.
- The single central record is kept electronically and is a meticulous and compliant record that all necessary checks have been carried out. In addition to these checks, individual staff are required to reflect annually and self-certify that they believe that they remain suitable to work at the school.
- The school is likely to meet the independent school standards in this part if it receives approval for the implementation of the material change.

#### Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

##### *Paragraphs 22–27*

- The school is situated in a very rural part of Devon. The premises are extremely well maintained and decorated and provide an oasis of tranquillity for its pupils. Classrooms are designed for small groups and provide a calm environment for pupils with autism spectrum disorder or who have social or emotional challenges.
- The number of toilets and showers are sufficient for the number of pupils requested by the proprietor. Separate staff facilities are spacious enough to accommodate the extra staff envisaged should the material change be granted.
- The buildings are safe and well ventilated, with good levels of lighting. Acoustics are acceptable. There is a designated medical room with a toilet, shower and bed available should a pupil become unwell.

##### *Paragraph 28*

- The school has its own water supply, which was tested in November 2022 and requires a higher level of filtration. In the meantime, all taps have been labelled to show that pupils should not drink from them and drinking-water stations have been placed around the school.

##### *Paragraph 29*

- The school's outdoor space is extensive and allows pupils to play team sports, have quiet time alone, or simply relax. The school courtyard and parts of the garden are planted with attractive shrubs and flowers.

- The school is likely to meet the independent school standards in this part if it receives approval for the implementation of the material change.

## Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

### *Paragraph 34*

- Leaders are committed to providing the best possible education to pupils who attend the school. The proprietor and principal work determinedly with Devon and Somerset local authorities to ensure that pupils can maintain the best possible connection with siblings and parents.
- The level of investment in staff training is noteworthy. A very strong culture of training for all staff is apparent. Staff talk knowledgeably about the pupils they teach, whom they enable to taste success, emotionally, socially and academically. One pupil said, 'I'd be a criminal without this school.'
- The principal and senior staff are held to account by the proprietor which, for example, expects to be informed within the hour of restraint on a child. The school has a philosophy of not excluding any pupil regardless of the challenges that pupil may bring.
- The material change requested is intended to enable the school to show greater flexibility in its capacity to support schools in the area that occasionally have a short-term requirement for a pupil to benefit from the education, care and facilities on offer at the Libra School.
- At the standard inspection in February 2022, and this material change inspection, the independent school standards have been met consistently.
- The school is likely to meet the independent school standards in this part if it receives approval for the implementation of this material change.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that are relevant to the material change.

## School details

Unique reference number	133392
DfE registration number	878/6202
Inspection number	10286559

This inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards relevant to the material change that the school has applied to make.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Blackford Education (Schools) Limited
Chair	Joan Wilkes
Headteacher	Kirsty Crosby
Annual fees (day pupils)	£62,261 to £76,371
Telephone number	01598 740044
Website	libraschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@libraschool.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	1 to 3 February 2022

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	5 to 18	5 to 18	5 to 18
Number of pupils on the school roll	45	50	50

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed

Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	45	50
Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	45	50
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	45	50
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	45	50

## Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	9	11
Number of part-time teaching staff	3	3
Number of staff in the welfare provision	20	21

## Information about this school

- All pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils also have autism spectrum disorder.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan, funded by a range of local authorities.
- The school is registered for 45 pupils between the ages of five and 18 years old. The school does not use any alternative provisions.
- All pupils attend the school full time.

## Information about this inspection

- The Department for Education commissioned this material change inspection in response to the school's request to increase the number of approved pupil places to 50.
- The inspector met with the principal, the designated safeguarding lead, the school business manager and the chair of governors, who in her role as director is also the proprietor body's representative.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documents provided by the school, including policies related to safeguarding and health and safety and the single central record. The inspector met with leaders to discuss the material change request and had a tour of the whole school site.

## Inspection team

Bradley Simmons, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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