

# The Libra School

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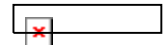
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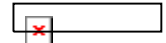
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## Introduction and summary

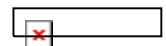


## Purpose and scope of the inspection



This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

## Information about the school

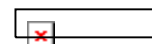


The Libra School is an independent day special school founded in 1999 which moved to its current premises in 2001. It provides education for up to 10 boys and girls aged between 8 and 18 years who have emotional, social and behavioural needs. Currently there are 9 pupils on roll. These pupils exhibit severe, challenging behaviours and are considered unable to live or be educated within their home locality. They all have a statement of special educational need. All pupils attend full-time and are brought to the school each day from accommodation provided by the parent company, Blackford Education Ltd. They are referred to the school and funded by London boroughs as well as counties in southern England. The school employs qualified teachers and others with specialist skills in vocational and recreational activities. The school, located in a former farmhouse in rural North Devon, is being developed for the sole purpose of education.

The school aims to provide a form of education responsive to the needs of individuals. It promotes

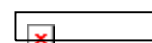
personal challenges for each pupil within behaviour management programmes designed to be positive and proactive. The school works closely with each pupil's residence with the aim of providing cohesive care and education.

### Summary of main findings



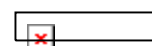
The Libra School provides purposeful and challenging opportunities for its pupils. It fully achieves its aims of providing each pupil with a range of educational experiences and emotional security which enable them to become mature young adults. During their time at the school all pupils make at least good progress and some make very good progress. The curriculum is good because it is broad yet personalised. It fully takes into account the needs of each pupil. Its impact is enhanced through teachers' good preparation of lessons which stimulate and involve pupils fully. Assessment is used effectively to obtain an initial understanding of pupils' attainment and in lessons enables teachers to extend pupils' learning. Pupils' behaviour is very good. The skill, patience and understanding of all staff in managing this contributes well to the progress which pupils make in forming relationships with their peers and others. The school is very successful in promoting the self-confidence, independence and self-esteem of pupils.

### What the school does well



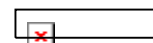
- it provides good teaching which successfully encourages pupils to enjoy learning and make good progress;
- it provides very good opportunities for learning derived from a broad curriculum appropriate to the needs of pupils;
- it offers a very well planned personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme;
- it provides good liaison between residential and education staff which benefits pupils' personal and academic development;
- it enables pupils to improve their behaviour so they are better equipped to return to their home community; and
- it has good arrangements to monitor and safeguard pupils' welfare and well-being.

### What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations



- assist pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions, as detailed in section 2 of this report; and
- complete more rigorous checks prior to confirming the appointment of staff as identified in section 4.

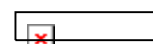
### What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002



In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA, the school should:

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

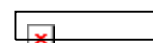
### Next steps



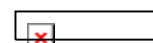
Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- plan a more rigorous programme in literacy and numeracy; and
- offer a wider range of accreditation in vocational courses.

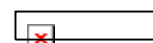
### Compliance with the regulations for registration



#### 1. The quality of education provided by the school



##### The quality of the curriculum



The school succeeds in providing a broad and personalised curriculum for each pupil. This is rooted in the requirements of the National Curriculum but its organisation is sufficiently flexible to enable pupils to pursue individual interests and talents. All subjects of the National Curriculum, appropriate for pupils in Years 7 to 11 are taught. The school also provides for a good range of vocational and recreational skills. These are tailored to meet the needs and interests of individual pupils.

The quality of the PSHE programme is very good and gives pupils many appropriate opportunities to develop their self-esteem. This cornerstone of the school's provision is very effective because it is planned well and monitored closely. Residential and school staff are responsible for its implementation and there is a seamless provision between the two groups.

All subjects have appropriate schemes of work although the quality of planning for these varies according to the subject. The planning for literacy and numeracy does not provide clear stages of progression in learning for each pupil. This is particularly so for those pupils in Key Stage 3. Subjects such as drama, art, and design and technology are planned well and provide clear steps for pupils to make progress. Drama includes development of pupils' skills in speaking and listening. This is a very good programme, which encourages pupils' confidence in social situations and public speaking events, such as school plays.

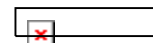
The needs of pupils, identified in their statements of special education need, are met. The school uses a period of assessment when a pupil is admitted. This results in individual education plans. Staff show a good awareness of these and incorporate them within their teaching.

The timetable gives sufficient time for most subjects. Lessons are 45 minutes long and represent intensive periods of learning. The balance of time devoted to literacy is insufficient for some pupils. Little time is lost during the course of the day because pupils turn up on time for each lesson.

A significant strength of the curriculum is its success in the development of pupils' vocational and recreational skills. This element is provided by instructors who have expertise in the areas of estate management, construction, engineering and outdoor education. Pupils are fully involved in the restoration of parts of the property, such as the mill-pond and leats which cross the grounds. Recreational interests of pupils are nurtured by the school. It provides opportunities for pupils to experience tall-ship sailing, canal barge navigation, horse and stable management, scuba-diving and power-boat management. Pupils are encouraged to become accredited in some of these, such as British Horse Society Stage 1 and Royal Yachting Association Competent Crew. Vocational accreditation, however, is under-represented in this portfolio of pupils' achievements, though one pupil has qualified as a fork-lift truck operator.

The impact of this broad curriculum is that pupils are prepared well for their next phase of education and life. Their exposure to such a high number of varied and good quality experiences successfully re-engages all pupils in the enjoyment of education.

### **The quality of the teaching and assessment**



The quality of teaching is good. In most lessons observed teaching was at least good and in some of these it was very good. Pupils are taught on a basis of one to one. The expertise and subject knowledge of teachers are very good. Within their chosen fields they are well qualified.

A common factor in many lessons is the variety of activities used by teachers to engage and maintain the interest of pupils. This successful technique ensures that pupils kept learning throughout each lesson. The skill of teachers is such that all of these activities are chosen to support the main theme of the lesson. In a drama lesson, for example, a pupil was learning how to initiate social interaction. The teacher provided a large number of quick-fire situations to which the pupil responded. The success of the lesson was evident in a scenario when the pupil was asked to take his pet to the vet. Showing how quickly he was learning, the pupil asked if he should first telephone for an appointment.

Planning of lessons is good and provides good structure to pupils' learning. These plans take full account of previous learning and provide good challenges for pupils. The impact of the planning is made more effective because teachers have a good understanding of pupils' special needs and take these fully into account. This is particularly so where pupils are reluctant to attempt new learning. The empathy and good expertise of staff is such that all pupils complete the tasks presented to them.

Teachers' expectations of pupils' work and behaviour are high. Management of behaviour is embedded within a clearly understood behaviour policy. Its effectiveness is enhanced because pupils have very good relationships with their teachers. Pupils complete extra pieces of work simply because the teacher asks them. This is a significant development in pupils who have previously shunned all forms of education. It is evident that pupils enjoy learning. They arrive at lessons on time, settle quickly to work and concentrate throughout. As a result their learning is effective.

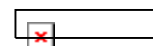
Pupils' learning is underpinned by good assessment techniques. These begin when pupils are first

admitted to the school and continue in the form of end-of-module tests, culminating in termly and annual reports. The majority of lessons finish with pupils' summarising what they have learned. Though these are effective mechanisms which check pupils' knowledge and understanding, recording of the outcomes is insufficient.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

**2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**



The school is strongly committed to the promotion of all aspects of pupils' personal development. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is supported effectively. The provision for pupils' multi-cultural understanding is under-developed.

Pupils are provided with opportunities to reflect on how their attitudes and behaviour may affect themselves and others. They are encouraged to consider and appreciate environmental issues in their restoration work around the school grounds. Pupils enjoy being recognised for their effort. Discussion with some indicates this is a new experience and they show considerable appreciation of the staff, who they feel have encouraged them to achieve their best.

It is a central aim of the school to provide pupils with a balanced moral outlook. In this it is successful. Staff provide good role models. Pupils are taught to respect each other. They are taught how to either avoid conflict or modify their responses in order to minimise this. Staff treat the pupils with utmost respect and this serves as the basis for the good relationships to be found between them. The school successfully uses a process of reparation which enables pupils to gain a good understanding of the differences between right and wrong.

When pupils are admitted to the school they often have very poor social skills. Provision to improve this is very good. It includes a wide range of experiences, such as the presentation of a short play to a local primary school. More formal provision is made through the Towards Independence module accredited by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network. Although much of the pupils' work has an individual character, they are wholeheartedly aware of the difference they can make when they pull together as a community. Charitable causes, such as Comic Relief and recent disaster relief appeals have all benefited from the fund-raising activities of pupils.

Pupils are exposed to a rich vein of cultural experiences. In conjunction with school staff they perform Shakespeare plays for parents' open days. They visit museums and art galleries which support their current learning. However, there is insufficient provision to raise pupils' knowledge and awareness of multi-cultural issues.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

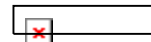
The school meets all but one of the requirements.

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- assist pupils to acquire an appreciation of other cultures in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions (paragraph 2(e)).

### 3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils



Pupils' welfare and well-being are safeguarded through very good provision and routines. Pupils are given consistent and close adult attention and supervision at all times. The supervision is low key but thorough and made more effective because of the good quality relationships staff have with pupils. Pupils are enabled to thrive and grow in confidence because they feel safe and secure. Discussion with pupils indicates that they appreciate the work done by staff on their behalf.

There are appropriate policies which show in detail the procedures to safeguard the health and welfare of pupils. These are effective because they are implemented consistently. The named person for child protection procedures is well qualified and experienced.

The behaviour management system is firmly rooted in the practice of rewarding genuine and positive change. Pupils recognise that any rewards and praise are merited. They value them more because of this. There have been no exclusions from the school. Challenging behaviour is viewed as part of a pupils' condition. Where this occurs, different or varied approaches to its management are put into operation. Staff are calm and professional in the face of, at times, quite provocative behaviour. Records are made of any incidents. Conflict resolutions are planned in a way that have due regard to each pupil's dignity and longer-term interests.

The school maintains and completes appropriate admission and daily attendance registers. Fire safety assessments and procedures are satisfactory. Emergency evacuation procedures are carried out appropriately. Visits by the local fire and rescue service recognise the efficiency of these and the more general fire risk assessments. The school endorses the requirements of the DDA although it has not yet compiled a three-year plan specific to its circumstances.

#### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

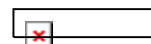
Yes.

#### ***What does the school need to do to comply with the DDA?***

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA the school should:

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

### 4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff



The procedures to obtain clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau for all staff prior to confirmation of their appointment are insecure. Some staff, particularly those who are part-time, have not been subject to this procedure. There is no record of medical checks to ensure staff are fit to perform their roles.

#### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

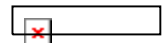
No.

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- ensure that prior to the confirmation of their appointment, staff at the school are subject to a check with the Criminal Records Bureau to confirm their suitability to work with children (paragraph 4(b)); and
- ensure that prior to the appointment of all staff appropriate checks have been carried out to confirm their medical fitness and use such information in determining whether their appointment will be confirmed (paragraph 4(c)).

**5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation**



The school is located within a range of farm buildings surrounded by its own land of some 150 acres. The former farmhouse and adjacent buildings provide a range of generously proportioned rooms which have been adapted to provide good quality facilities.

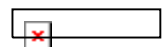
The school management has embarked on a plan of re-development. Some of the adjacent buildings now provide specialist facilities such as a science room, art and drama studio, fitness suite and craft workshops. The grounds are used extensively to increase the range of opportunities for pupils to extend their academic and vocational skills.

The quality of the fittings and resources is good. These meet the pupils' needs very well and provide facilities which reflect their ages and interests. Pupils' work is carefully displayed throughout the school confirming the value and appreciation placed on it.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

**6. The quality of information for parents and other partners**



Parents are provided with an informative booklet when their child is first registered at the school. This prospectus is an attractive publication, which includes all the required information presented in a readable format. Parents are given a clear indication of how the school works and what it hopes to achieve on behalf of their children.

The school prepares good quality reports. These provide the basis for statutory annual reviews. In addition, reports are prepared each term which give clear indicators of the progress made by pupils. These are supported by information from tests. A majority of parents believe the school keeps them well informed, particularly about their child's progress. They appreciate the school's effort in including them in its activities; for example the regular open days during which pupils display the work they have achieved.

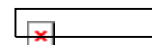
Information provided to other parties, such as local authorities, is clear and concise.



***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

**7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints**

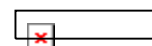


There is a very effective policy for handling complaints. The procedures are comprehensive and written in a style easily accessible to all readers. A majority of parents indicated through the pre-inspection questionnaire that they understood the complaints procedure.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

**School details**



Name of school:	The Libra School		
DfES ref number:	933/6202		
Type of school:	Special day school for pupils with EBD		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of pupils:	8 - 18 years		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys 6,	Girls 3,	Total 9
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys 6,	Girls 3,	Total 9
Annual fees (day pupils):	£52,000 - £68,000		
Address of school:	Crosscombe Barton Lynton Devon EX35 6JW		
E-mail address:	ginawilkes@ukonline.co.uk		
Telephone number:	01598 752666		
Fax number:	01598 752630		
Headteacher:	Mrs J E Wilkes		
Proprietor:	Blackford Education Ltd t/a Libra		
Lead Inspector:	Mr Tom Smith		
Dates of inspection:	18 - 21 April 2005		