

# **Inspection report**

## **Learning Opportunities Centre**

**Independent special school**

**DfES ref no: 886/6063**

**Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002**

**Dates of inspection: 13 – 16 March 2006**

## **INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY**

### **Purpose and scope of the inspection**

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A 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**

Learning Opportunities Centre is a day school in Ringwould providing education for boys and girls aged from 11 to 16. The school refers to its pupils as 'students'. It aims to encourage all students to reach their full potential emotionally, spiritually, physically and academically by providing a curriculum that matches and extends the National Curriculum. It has places for 22 students; at the time of the inspection there were 16 on roll. All have statements of special educational need and most are in the care of the local authority, either in residential or foster care. Most attend full-time but a small number have part-time placements when they first arrive. Students are unable to attend mainstream schools because of their emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. When they arrive, they attain at levels below those expected nationally, mainly because of their interrupted education. They also have low self-esteem, weak literacy skills and poor attitudes to learning. Students travel daily to the centre, using transport arranged by Kent County Council.

### **Summary of main findings**

Learning Opportunities Centre provides a good education. Once students have settled, their self-esteem grows, their behaviour improves and they begin to engage in learning. As a result, they make good progress and achieve well. Students feel safe and well supported; the arrangements to assure their health and safety are good. Teaching is good, and the centre provides a range of learning experiences that meets students' needs well. The premises and accommodation are satisfactory. Staffing levels are good and the centre is well managed. Relationships with external agencies are good. The centre has an efficient link with the Kent local authority, through which it liaises with all local authorities that have students at the centre.

### **What the school does well:**

- individual support for students helps them to make impressive gains in their reading, spelling and handwriting;
- relationships between staff and students are very good, and there is a purposeful atmosphere in classrooms, with a clear focus on learning. The centre has a harmonious atmosphere;
- staff are strongly committed to providing the best for students, and teamwork is well developed.

- there are good arrangements to encourage students to adopt healthy lifestyles and to develop their awareness of personal safety and well-being; and
- good numbers of staff, appealing tasks and the successful management of students ensure that they make good progress in lessons.

**What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:**

- provide separate toilet facilities for staff and students in Years 8 and 9;
- provide suitable facilities for students who are ill;
- include in the prospectus particulars of educational and welfare provision for students whose second language is English; and
- ensure parents are aware they can request information about the number of staff, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications.

**Next Steps**

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

- increase information and communication technology (ICT) resources in classrooms so that staff can make greater use of ICT as a learning tool;
- identify specific learning outcomes for students of different abilities, share these with students and involve them in reviewing their learning in lessons;
- summarise records of students' attainment so that their progress can be tracked;
- strengthen the provision for design and technology by appointing a specialist teacher and creating a room suitable for using resistant materials; and
- provide opportunities for students to develop business and enterprise skills, as the centre has planned.

# **COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION**

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

### **The quality of the curriculum**

The centre's curriculum reflects well the provision required by students' statements of special educational need. The centre meets its aim to provide the full range of National Curriculum subjects. In addition to these subjects there is religious education and a comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education which includes sex and relationships education and drugs awareness. Careers education is taught to pupils in all year groups. There is a suitable balance between subjects, and in addition, students have access to personal programmes such as individual literacy tutoring and counselling.

In Years 8 and 9 there is a pre-vocational course of agricultural science. Students are prepared for the demands of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme in Years 10 and 11 through the Youth Service Challenge. Over the last three years, the centre has steadily increased the range of externally accredited courses in Years 10 and 11. Students now have access to eight courses that lead either to Entry Level qualifications or General Certificate of Secondary Education accreditation.

Most subjects cover broad programmes of study, but the centre is limited in the extent to which it can provide a range of learning experiences in design and technology as it has recently lost a teacher and has no dedicated room for resistant materials. Although there are plans for teaching a business and enterprise unit in Year 10, the centre does not provide enterprise education at this stage. This is formally recognised in the centre's improvement plan.

The centre has recently developed an ICT suite with a bank of new computers, but overall there are insufficient resources for ICT in the rest of the centre, which impacts on students' learning opportunities.

Curriculum planning is detailed enough to ensure that students do not miss out topics or repeat work unnecessarily. However, it does not take account of the fact that pupils are not all in classes made up of single year groups. Plans will need to be revised next year in order to avoid repetition.

The curriculum is enriched by a good range of sporting activities, a range of visits and visitors and a residential experience for Year 11 students. Students in Year 11 leave the centre well prepared for the next phase of their lives; they have developed clear job preferences and successfully completed work experience. Last summer all leavers went on to further education.

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

The quality of teaching ranges from satisfactory to very good and is mostly good. Staff are skilled in the management of students; they know them well and show that they respect and value them and their ideas. In turn, students show respect for staff and there is often a clear sense of staff and students working in partnership to

support learning. At the start of lessons learning outcomes are shared with students, and these are generally reviewed with them at the end. However, staff do not set different learning outcomes for students of different abilities, and occasionally more able students could tackle more difficult tasks or extension work.

There are good 'starter' activities for lessons that get students thinking, often recalling previous learning. Methods and tasks are well chosen to appeal to students. For instance in a Year 8 lesson they thoroughly enjoyed reading aloud to find out how the eye is similar to a camera, answering questions, then making pinhole cameras. Activities are allocated a set amount of time in each lesson plan and lessons usually proceed at a good pace. This is helped by the thorough preparation of lessons, with resources at the ready.

In most lessons there is an adult for every two students. They give good support, intervening when they sense that students are becoming unsettled but also encouraging them to do as much as they can.

Assessment procedures are satisfactory. On admission students are fully assessed, individual education plans formulated and targets set. Students are entered for national tests in Year 9. Each year, staff identify levels that students have attained in each subject, but students do not know which levels they are working at. Although staff record and report on the levels that students reach each year, there is no simple summary sheet on which staff can enter levels attained which might be used for tracking students' progress over time. Opportunities are missed to assess formally the good progress students make in terms of their personal development as staff rely on their thorough knowledge of students. Although staff give students good feedback in lessons, the marking of their work is inconsistent. Most work is marked conscientiously, with annotations that help students to improve, but some is left unmarked or simply ticked.

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

Yes.

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

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The good quality personal, social and health education programme, positive relationships between staff and students, and the ethos of the school, all effectively promote personal development and well-being. Students improve their behaviour and begin to forge positive relationships with adults and others. They learn to work in pairs, small groups and teams. There are good opportunities to socialise beyond school, at college, in the community and when playing competitive sports. Healthy eating has a high profile in the centre and several students identify ways in which this has changed their eating habits; they gradually make healthier choices, such as eating more fruit and fewer crisps. They have a thorough awareness of how to keep safe.

Students feel that they are listened to and can identify ways in which their ideas have been taken up. They learn to accept responsibility for their behaviour. Although there are few opportunities for students to take on responsibilities at the centre, they

make a good contribution to the local community. For instance, they have painted a local war memorial, cleared a path to enable wheelchair users to access a local area and taken part in a 'beach clean'. They also raise funds for charities of their choice.

Centre rules are well known and accepted; students appreciate the consistent application of the system of rewards and sanctions. Older students develop a clear set of values on a range of matters, including controversial issues such as euthanasia. Whilst the centre successfully increases students' self esteem and self-awareness, the 'thought for the day' sessions are not always used effectively to encourage reflection.

Staff challenge prejudice, such as racism, and students do become more tolerant. The curriculum emphasises positive attitudes towards cultural differences, and students learn about the many cultures and customs in Britain through religious education. In art and music, students are inspired by the work of artists from different cultures. There are satisfactory opportunities for students to learn about their own cultural heritage, how society works and what their rights and responsibilities are as citizens.

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

Yes.

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

The centre's policies and practice for students' welfare and health and safety are thorough and appropriate to their needs. Child protection procedures are clear and all staff, including those newly recruited, are trained in their implementation. The centre has comprehensive risk assessment procedures covering a wide range of activities, including off-site educational visits. Procedures for dealing with bullying and racism are good and all staff take these issues very seriously.

Policies covering control and discipline are well-considered and clearly explained. The behaviour policy emphasises positive reinforcement of good behaviour, with rewards which are appropriate to the age-range of the students. There is a tariff of sanctions, with criteria for their application which are clearly stated.

The supervision of students is very good. There is a high ratio of staff to students and students are always supervised within and outside the building. On the rare occasion that a student leaves the buildings without permission, well-rehearsed procedures are employed in immediate response.

The centre provides meals for Key Stage 4 students, and Key Stage 3 students bring in their own packed lunches. However, once a week students have the opportunity to cook lunch for themselves as part of their food technology lessons. Staff encourage and support a healthy eating policy in line with current guidelines by making available fruit and cereals at break time. Staff and students take their meals together which contributes well to the development of social skills.

Effective liaison is maintained with parents and external agencies, who participate fully in the review and planning procedures for each young person. The school has

a very thorough written plan to improve access which complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

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

Yes.

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

Prior to confirmation of appointment, appropriate checks are carried out to ensure that all staff are suitable to work with children, including checks with the Criminal Records Bureau.

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

Yes.

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

Accommodation is satisfactory overall. The centre is sited in a semi-rural setting off a main road and close to the village. Plans have been drawn up and approved for a new Key Stage 3 (Years 8 - 9) block and planning permission has been granted. The work is due to be completed by September 2007.

Key Stage 3 students occupy a single-story wooden building which was once a school kitchen. This provides a full-sized and well-equipped food technology room and two classrooms. There are also two mobile buildings housing the science room and a common room which is also used as the dining room and for other activities, including music sessions. The main building provides the accommodation for students in Years 10 and 11. Classrooms are satisfactory in size and appropriately furnished to suit the age range of the students. Although there are separate male and female washrooms, students in Years 8 and 9 share these with staff.

There is specialist provision for art, but there is no separate area for design and technology. The large central hall or common room is under-used, apart from break and lunch times when meals are taken. There is no provision in any of the centre's buildings for students who are taken ill.

Outside there are separate hard-surfaced areas for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 students for recreational and physical activities. The large playing field on the site makes a good contribution to students' physical and social development. The centre has an allotment on site which is used in the growing season for cultivating vegetables.

***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 there sufficient washrooms for staff and pupils (paragraph 5(k)); and*
- *ensure there are appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l)).*

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

There is an informative prospectus for those who have an interest in the work of the centre. This document contains most of the information that it should but omits the centre's arrangements for students who speak English as an additional language. The centre does not ensure that parents are aware that they can request information on the number of staff and a summary of their qualifications.

Comprehensive reports are sent to parents describing the progress and attainments of students. Prior to an annual review taking place, information is circulated to all those that need it and detailed annual review reports are sent to parents, carers and local authorities. The school provides information to local authorities about reasons for fee increases.

***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;*

- *provide particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f)); and*
- *ensure parents are aware they can request particulars of the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(2)(k)).*

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

The school has a clear policy for handling complaints. Alongside initial informal measures, there are well-structured formal procedures by which complaints can be considered fairly and objectively. The complaints panel includes an independent member of the local community.

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

*Yes.*



## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Learning Opportunities Centre
DfES Number:	886/6063
Type of school:	Special school for pupils with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	11 – 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 12      Girls: 4      Total: 16
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 12      Girls: 4      Total: 16
Annual fees (day pupils):	£22,701
Address of school:	Ringwould Road Ringwould Deal Kent CT4 8DW
Telephone number:	01304 381906
Fax number:	01304 301906
Email address:	Lesley.buss@talk21.com
Headteacher:	Mr Mark Tipping (Acting head)
Proprietor:	Learning Opportunities Limited
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Sue Aldridge
Date of inspection:	13 – 16 March 2006

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