

# **Inspection report**

## **The Larches School**

**Independent special school**

**DfES ref no: 884/6010**

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

**Dates of inspection: 27 - 30 November 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**

The Larches caters for pupils who have severe emotional, behaviour and social difficulties. All pupils are in public care and have experienced numerous disruptions to their education. Pupils attend the school from 13 residential homes provided by the Clifford House organisation. These small group homes are intensively staffed according to the level of need of pupils. There were 20 pupils on roll at the time of the inspection, twelve boys and eight girls. The school is based on two sites, one in Leominster and the other 14 miles away in Hereford. Four pupils attend the school on a part-time basis. Fifteen pupils have statements of special educational need.

### **Summary of main findings**

The Larches provides a satisfactory quality of education. It promotes pupils' personal and academic development soundly. The curriculum offered to pupils is broad and balanced and it helps to prepare them effectively for their next stage of life. Pupils enjoy the good range of physical activities on offer. Pupils' attendance at school is much improved upon their previous schooling. Teaching is broadly satisfactory, with examples of good teaching. Information and communication technology (ICT) is not used widely enough to enhance teaching and learning in lessons. The care provided for pupils is satisfactory and pupils are treated with respect. However, this is at odds with the extremely high levels of physical interventions used on pupils. The accommodation at the Hereford site provides good facilities, but the Leominster site makes the management of pupils' behaviour more difficult, as it is too cramped. There are also some health and safety concerns regarding this site. The school does not meet a substantial number of the requirements for registration.

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

- it provides a secure and caring environment where pupils can start to experience stability in their lives;
- pupils are effectively prepared for adult life through the 'skills for life' programme;
- pupils generally enjoy school. Their attendance improves and they make steady progress in the subjects they study;

- pupils make improvements in their attitudes towards learning and towards one another;
- teaching is at least satisfactory and some teaching is good.

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

- improve the quality of assessment;
- attend to the issues noted in relation to the welfare, health and safety of pupils detailed in section 3 of this report;
- improve the accommodation as indicated in section 5 of the report; and
- include additional information for parents as detailed in section 6.

**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.

# **COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION**

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

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

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. The curriculum gives pupils the opportunity to attain nationally recognised qualifications and to develop their self-confidence. It is broad and balanced. There is an overall curriculum policy. However, planning for subjects in science and English are not as well developed as the planning for mathematics. Schemes of work indicate what topics are to be covered, but some are too brief to help teachers to plan consistently across the school. The school has recently introduced practical investigations in science and pupils are beginning to enjoy this subject much more.

Pupils are prepared effectively for adult life through the 'skills for life' programme, which encompasses preparation for employment and covers valuable skills such as job seeking, interview techniques, preparing a curriculum vitae and undertaking work experience placements. Key Stage 4 pupils have two work experience opportunities. A good range of local businesses is used to provide work experience placements, such as estate agents, garages and hairdressers. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme encourages pupils to develop healthier and safer lifestyles through drugs awareness, sex and relationships education and the study of personal finance. This provides a helpful framework for pupils to develop their personal development.

Pupils achieve the best results in examinations and tests in mathematics. External validation of pupil achievement is pursued through General Certificate of Secondary Education and Entry Level examinations. However, accreditation for pupils of lower attainment is too limited.

Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for each pupil are drawn up by the form tutor and reviewed termly by the tutor and pupil. These help to focus the attention of teachers upon the particular needs of a pupil and how they may be best met. IEPs are linked to the pupils' individual targets, monitored through a weekly planner. Targets set in pupils' IEPs are sound. They are helpful in developing positive attitudes to their work, but targets set for English and mathematics are often too vague to enable progress to be measured accurately. Pupils who have statements of special educational need, usually for their emotional and behavioural needs, have their needs met satisfactorily. Annual reviews are held. Broad targets are set for the following year which inform the revision of IEPs. Transition planning is thorough to ensure that pupils' needs are effectively met for the future.

A good range of extra-curricular activities, such as sporting activities, music club, and outdoor pursuit and fund raising ventures, complements the curriculum. The good range of sports offered, such as kayaking, walking and rugby, encourages young people to get fit.

Currently four pupils attend the school on a part-time basis and are working toward full-time education. Appropriate tutoring and programmes of work are carried out in the pupils' residential home, with a view to integrating them back into full-time education.

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

Teaching is satisfactory overall, with examples of good teaching in physical education (PE), geography, design and technology and religious education (RE). Teaching groups are kept small so that there is a good level of individual support available to all pupils. Teachers are skilled at managing and diffusing potentially difficult situations. They manage to avoid confrontation successfully and remain calm in challenging circumstances. Relationships between staff and pupils are generally positive and supportive. However, on occasions there are too many staff present and this situation can become too intense for pupils.

Where teaching is good, lessons are planned thoroughly. The best teaching uses a variety of methods, such as discussion, dialogue and video to make learning interesting. Some teachers have good subject knowledge, teach with confidence and engage pupils' attention successfully. They set a good level of challenge and pupils respond well to this.

The school has a small ICT suite, but generally ICT is not used widely enough to support pupils' learning in lessons across the school. This means that there is an over-emphasis on work sheets and mundane written work. Pupils find this work unimaginative and find it difficult to sustain concentration. The three-part lesson structure, with an introduction and a final plenary, is used on a very limited basis and the pace of lessons is not always brisk enough. Plenary sessions review pupils' attitudes to learning, but are not used to rehearse the main learning points of the lesson. Not all teachers keep their subject knowledge up to date.

Baseline assessments of pupils' skills on entry to the school are rudimentary. Not enough effort is put into obtaining pupils' levels of attainment from their previous schools, although in many cases this is difficult as some pupils have been out of school for considerable periods of time. The initial assessment of pupils' skills is inconsistent across the school, with each department having its own approach. The absence of rigorous assessment information makes it difficult to determine pupils' rates of progress. Assessment is not used well enough to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of pupils' performance so as to inform future teaching effectively. Target setting, based on pupils' prior attainments, is not used well enough to raise both pupils' and teachers' expectations.

### ***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:*

- *ensure there is a framework in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and that this assessment information is utilised to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).*

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

Pupils' personal development is broadly satisfactory. Pupils improve their attendance at school, with one pupil commenting, 'I used to truant, but now I attend school all the time'. The school seeks to build up pupils' self-esteem and perception of self-worth through its focus on rewarding good behaviour and achievement. The expectations of pupils' behaviour are made explicit and supported through the 'points' system. Pupils can earn points by meeting their targets. The reward system is prominently displayed in all classrooms, helping to keep pupils actively aware of its importance. Pupils think this works well; they understand the system and believe it helps them to make progress.

The link between behaviour and its consequences is emphasised through the behaviour policy and contributes to pupils' awareness of how their behaviour affects themselves and others. The programmes of study in RE help to reinforce a sense of right and wrong. The daily planner has high significance for pupils' achievement. The tutors and pupils set short-term targets, which relate directly to longer-term goals set in the pupils' IEPs. The pupils' responses to these targets are consistently recorded after each lesson, emphasising the importance of sound working habits and demonstrating to individuals how they can make progress over time. The precise verbal feedback given by some teachers encourages individual pupils to be more accurate and honest in their appraisal of their conduct in the lesson. The weekly individual and group awards celebrate success and encourage a sense of community. Pupils contribute their suggestions for joint activities such as the tutor groups' day visits out of school. Pupils have some opportunities to take on a limited responsibility, as for example, when they raise money for specific charities, but opportunities are not routinely planned for pupils to develop their initiative.

Topics studied in PSHE give pupils opportunities to explore ethical issues, to learn how to develop a point of view and to begin to accommodate the views of others. The lack of a course in citizenship means that aspects of wider social responsibility are covered in a more ad hoc way through work in other subjects. Work in geography and RE contributes to pupils' understanding of cultures and faiths other than their own, but not enough is yet planned across the curriculum to fully support this aspect of their development.

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

Yes.

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

The procedures to ensure the welfare, health and safety of pupils are not sufficiently secure. The policy for child protection is thorough, and training for all new members

of staff is included in the induction procedures. The anti-bullying policy is clear, well understood and effective.

The school is not meeting a number of regulations. Although it has a brief health and safety policy, this does not have adequate regard to the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) guidance. Extensive risk assessments are undertaken for all visits out of school, but there is no written policy which takes account of DfES guidance on the health and safety of pupils on school visits. In addition, some procedures and aspects, such as adult-to-pupil ratios, are not precisely set out.

Fire fighting equipment is regularly serviced and tested and the school has regular, logged fire drills. It does not meet fire safety requirements because it has not completed an annual fire risk assessment. There is no written policy for First Aid although staff are trained and there are several qualified First Aiders.

The school's behaviour policy promotes appropriate behaviour. In the lessons seen, behaviour was at least satisfactory and sometimes good. However, at both sites, the high number of incidents requiring physical restraint gives rise to concern. Since September 2005 records show there have been over 400 incidents of physical restraints used on pupils. The company's policy states that this is action to be used only as a 'last resort'. All such incidents are scrupulously recorded and staff have received appropriate training. The frequent use of this intervention is at odds with the school's aim of achieving mutual respect between members of its community. In consequence, this aspect of behaviour intervention should be reviewed.

In PE and PSHE pupils study aspects of healthy living so that they gradually build up a clear understanding of good diet and the importance of regular exercise. Drugs awareness is rightly an integral part of the PSHE curriculum, contributing to pupils' understanding of the safer choices available to them. The admission and attendance registers are kept in accordance with regulations. The school has no written plan to increase the accessibility of the building as required by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (2002).

***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 fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:*

- *prepare and implement a written policy relating to the health and safety of pupils on activities outside the school which has regard to DfES guidance 'Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits' (paragraph 3(2)(c));*
- *write a health and safety policy having regard to the DfES guidance 'Health and Safety: Responsibilities and Powers' (paragraph 3(4));*
- *carry out an annual fire risk assessment as required by the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 (paragraph 3(5)); and*

- *devise and implement a First Aid policy (paragraph 3(6)).*

***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 outline how it will increase the accessibility of the premises.*

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

The school has robust procedures for the appointment of all staff. Rigorous checks are undertaken, including those with the Criminal Records Bureau, to ensure their suitability to work with children.

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

Yes.

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

The school is based on two sites, one in Leominster and the other in Hereford. The Hereford accommodation is good. Classrooms are of a good size and meet the needs of pupils very well. There is a suitable outdoor play area. This accommodation is well suited to its purpose and provides a pleasant learning environment for pupils. The Leominster site is very compact. It has the feel of a domestic building rather than an educational one, but staff work hard to create a conducive learning environment. These premises have some serious shortcomings. Classrooms are small and the outdoor play area is restrictive. The kitchen facilities are unsuitable for preparing lunches on site and there is a risk of hot drinks being spilled, as the kitchen is part of a thoroughfare. There is no fire escape for the two upstairs classrooms. The cramped nature of this site also makes it more difficult to manage pupils' disruptive behaviour effectively.

***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 is sufficient access so that emergency evacuations can be accomplished safely for all pupils, including those with special needs (paragraph 5(g));*
- *having regard to the number, age and needs (including any special needs) of pupils, ensure all classrooms are an appropriate size to allow effective teaching,*



*and that all areas of the school do not compromise health or safety (paragraph 5(j)); and*

- *where food is served, ensure there are adequate facilities for its hygienic preparation, serving and consumption (paragraph 5(m)).*

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

The school fails to meet many of the requirements relating to the provision of information. Much of the company's documentation focuses on the details of its residential care home facilities and services, with little information about the educational provision of the school. As a result, essential information such as the aims and ethos of the school is not made explicit. Parents and other partners are not made aware of other information which should be available to them on request, such as the range of policies on bullying, behaviour, child protection and pupils' safety. Financial information is not provided for local authorities who fund pupils at the school.

Reports for each pupil are written as required to coincide with the reviews required by pupils' placement authorities. These reports give information about the curriculum courses being followed, with a detailed account of the pupil's strengths and areas for development within each subject. Attitudes to work and progress against specified targets are made explicit, giving an informative indication of each pupil's achievement across the review period.

### ***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 to parents and other partners:*

- *the school's address and telephone number and the name of the headteacher (paragraph 6(2)(a));*
- *a statement of the school's ethos (including any religious ethos) and aims (paragraph 6(2)(d));*
- *particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions, discipline and exclusions 6(2)(e)); and*
- *particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements and for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f)).*

*In addition, the school should make parents aware of the availability of:*

- *particulars of policies relating to bullying, child protection, health and safety, the promotion of good behaviour, and sanctions adopted in the event of pupils misbehaving (paragraph 6(2)(h));*
- *particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(2)(i));*
- *details of the complaints procedure adopted by the school, together with details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j));*
- *the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(2)(k)); and*
- *where a pupil, who is registered at the school, is wholly or partly funded by the local authority an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of that pupil should be submitted to the local authority and on request to the Secretary of State (paragraph 6(7)).*

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

The school has a thorough and comprehensive complaints policy and procedure. Two complaints from pupils have been received and recorded since 2004, but none have progressed to the formal stage.

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

Yes.

## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	The Larches School
DfES Number:	884/6010
Type of school:	Severe emotional, behavioural and social difficulties
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	11– 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 10    Girls: 6    Total: 16
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 2    Girls: 2    Total: 4
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 10    Girls: 5    Total: 15
Annual fees (day pupils):	Full-time: £31,200, part-time:£22,880
Address of school:	The Larches School Coningsby Road Leominster Herefordshire HR6 8LL
Telephone number:	01568 610279
Fax number:	01568 610279
Email address:	Larches@btconnect.com
Headteacher:	Mr A Mcdouall
Proprietors:	Mr N. Nenadich, Mr T Starkey, Mr J Brierley, Ms L Gresty
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Frank Price
Date of inspection:	27 - 30 November 2006

© Crown copyright 2006. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

School inspection reports are available on the Ofsted website ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The website lists Ofsted independent school inspection reports, together with information on the work Ofsted does in the independent sector.