

The On Track Education Centre (Luton)

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	821/6005
Unique Reference Number	134137
Inspection number	316897
Inspection dates	20-21 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Marianick Ellender-Gelé HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

The On Track Education Centre in Luton provides alternative education for young people aged from 11 to 17. Many have learning difficulties and all have had a disjointed education experience either because they suffer from school phobia, have emotional and behavioural difficulties or have been excluded from mainstream schools. The centre also caters for some young people who are in local authority care. Entry to the centre can happen at any time of the year. Each student follows an individual learning programme which, for some, includes study at local mainstream schools. The centre aims to enable all young people to experience positive achievement and success through their studies and acquire skills and knowledge relevant to preparation for adult life. The management and many of the staff changed at the beginning of this academic year. On Track Education Services Ltd now runs the centre, opened in 1996 and previously named Bramingham Park Study Centre, and a new headteacher was appointed in September 2007.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education and care provided by The On Track Education Centre (Luton) is good. The curriculum allows students to follow specific courses relevant to their needs and abilities. It is planned well to ensure thorough acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills and for many students it offers a last chance of success in improving their social skills and obtaining worthwhile accreditation. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is planned well to support learning across a range of subjects. Teaching is good and students receive effective individual help; this, combined with the well-targeted support provided by learning assistants, leads to good progress in learning. The centre complies with nearly all of the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. It is centred on the individual and tailors the topics to the learning needs of each student. The curriculum rightly focuses on developing key skills and offers many opportunities to prepare young people for the next steps of their education or working life. For example, a good proportion of time is given to understanding how business works through fieldwork, the health and beauty course or the mini-enterprise business scheme. Students confirm that they

like studying at the centre because teachers mentor them well and there is very good support in and outside timetabled lessons. The centre is aware of its areas for development. These include the need to offer a broader range of vocational subjects, such as engineering, so as to improve transition to work or further study post-16.

A carefully constructed personal, social, health and citizenship education programme covers relevant topics. It raises students' awareness on many issues such as relationships, safety and making a positive contribution to society. The provision for teaching students about the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle is good. The centre makes effective use of local speakers as well as specialist facilities for physical education, including swimming. Enrichment through extra-curricular opportunities is at the planning stage. Some educational visits enhance subjects well, for example in business studies and horticulture.

Teaching is good. The very small classes result in focused teaching, including one-to-one, and this has a positive impact on students' motivation and confidence. Although planning is rigorous for those with serious needs it does not always cater sufficiently well for the higher achievers in the group, who need more opportunities to think independently and develop problem-solving skills. Teachers take great care over the preparation of interesting tasks and frame questions effectively to support and encourage the less confident learners. Opportunities are given outside lessons, such as through creative writing and GCSE coursework, to develop students' own initiative and study skills. There is scope to develop this further to improve research skills and students' sense of responsibility for their learning. Relationships are very good, helping students' concentration and diligence. The use of ICT as a teaching and learning tool is well developed and contributes to students' pride in their work.

Staff know each student well and assess their work informally during lessons and formally to inform reports to parents. Helpful feedback to students raises their self-esteem because comments on effort and achievement are very positive. However, comments are, at times, so sensitive that they lack accuracy and young people are not told clearly enough what they need to improve and how they can improve.

Students make good progress from a very low starting point. Over time, most acquire the necessary skills and concepts needed to move on to jobs and gain relevant qualifications. Progress in speaking and listening skills is good. Some students have serious gaps in reading and writing because of their discontinued education experience but teachers provide good academic and welfare support, helping them to catch up on missed work. The one-to-one support that learning assistants provide contributes strongly to their understanding of the task in hand. Most students try hard and show respect for the learning needs of others in the group. Students on GCSE courses show excellent levels of commitment and make good progress. Teaching is skilful enough to ensure that boys and girls progress equally well and teachers target their questions to match the particular needs of each young person. Despite much commitment, the centre is not yet able to demonstrate a seamless learning and welfare experience for part-time students

because of insufficient liaison with mainstream schools or other providers. This is necessary to share assessment outcomes, improve progression in students' learning and development and secure their well-being.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The centre makes good provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all young people. The desired impact of this good provision on the personal development of some students is yet to be demonstrated fully. For example, some still lack the necessary skills to function in a large organisation and some do not always choose to apply the healthy lifestyle taught as part of personal, social and health education. Nonetheless, the centre makes a great deal of difference to the life and well-being of many. Good behaviour and attitudes reflect the fact that the great majority of students enjoy being at the centre, many attend regularly and some have asked to attend full-time. Relationships are good and there is a very strong mutual respect between staff and students. The centre takes appropriate steps to deal with the rare incidents of bullying and students confirm that bullying is not tolerated. Students look after one another very well. They care about the happiness of others and demonstrate this through their charity work. They are aware of the rich diversity of heritage in Luton and, under the new management, visits to places of interest are planned in order to develop further students' understanding of tolerance and help them consolidate in practice the values taught at the centre. The citizenship programme gives students a broad awareness of how society works and of the main institutions and public services in England. Membership of the local youth club, managed by a skilled teacher, makes a positive contribution to students' personal development.

Students acquire the essential skills they need for their future lives and economic well-being as young adults. They respond readily to responsibility when given the opportunity, for example when working in the allotment as part of their horticulture course. However, despite the good centre provision, changes to attitudes and levels of maturity take much effort from staff and time to materialise. For example, for some, regular attendance and punctuality are not secure. Students are trusted but they said that they would like to contribute more to decision-making and have a say about provision at the centre. Inspection findings confirm that students have limited real influence on decisions which affect them. However, the staff are very open to suggestion and are keen to ensure that all young people have a voice.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of students is good. There is a good range of policies, and practices are in keeping with these. The new management ensures that all policies are updated as required, including review of the arrangements for fire safety which require specialist advice in order that evacuation and fire drills meet regulations. Students are supervised at all times and they feel safe and well cared for, although authorised and unauthorised absences are not

recorded clearly enough in registers. The centre fulfils its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Checks with the Criminal Records Bureau on the suitability of staff to work with children are carried out for all staff employed in the centre and all members of staff have been subject to the other appropriate checks. Procedures for appointing staff are very good and include the take up of professional references and checks on health and qualifications. The centre maintains a single central register of staff checks.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises are conducive to effective learning. The centre has a pleasant teaching space and a well-equipped ICT suite but space is tight. The main classroom is attractive and has been given a learning identity with specific areas for quiet reading, beauty therapy and group work. Students feel secure and respond very well to this working environment. There is a facility for students who are ill but no outdoor social or play area. Staff make good use of local facilities and there are plans to improve the centre further as part of the development of the Bramingham Church building.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The centre sends out appropriate materials to inform parents and prospective parents of its ethos, aims and policies. The right to request particular documentation is very clear and all required information is provided to parents, carers and others. Reports to parents and carers provide useful information on the achievement, commitment and effort of each young person.

Procedures for handling complaints

The procedures for handling complaints comply fully with the regulations but, in responding to the questionnaire for this inspection, some parents indicated that they are not confident about approaching the staff and some do not know how to proceed if they wish to complain. This inspection finds that staff are very approachable, the prospectus to parents clarifies that parents can ask for the complaints procedure and all necessary contact details are given.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- ensure that the prior attainment of all students is taken into account sufficiently in the planning of lessons, especially for the more able (paragraph 1(3)(d)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for students' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- improve procedures for fire drills and review the level of fire safety, identified by its risk assessment under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (paragraph 3(5))
- record authorised and unauthorised absence clearly in the attendance register (paragraph 3(9)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Improve lesson planning and the use of assessment to raise the expectations and achievement of more able learners.
- Make full use of multi-agency links, especially with schools, to promote better progression in learning and ensure continuity in the welfare support of all students.
- Involve students more fully in decision-making to improve provision further.

School details

Name of school	The On Track Education Centre (Luton)		
DCSF number	821/6005		
Unique reference number	134137		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 1996		
Age range of students	11-16		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 2	Girls: 5	Total: 7
Number on roll (part-time students)	Boys: 4	Girls: 4	Total: 8
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 1	Girls: 3	Total: 4
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 1	Girls: 1	Total: 2
Annual fees (day students)	£12,480-£20,160		
Address of school	On Track Education Centre (Luton) Bramingham Park Church Freeman Avenue Luton LU3 4BL		
Telephone number	01582 494696		
Fax number	01582 494696		
Email address	pratleybj@yahoo.com		
Headteacher	Mr J Pratley		
Proprietor	On Track Education Services Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Marianick Ellender-Gelé HMI		
Dates of inspection	20-21 November 2007		