

Learning Opportunities Centre Secondary

Independent Special School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	886/6063
Unique Reference Number	119013
Inspection number	330403
Inspection dates	11 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley 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.

This was a light touch inspection (LTI) which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

This is a small independent day special school, situated in a semi rural area near Dover. It is one of two establishments of the same name owned and run by Learning Opportunities Limited. The school opened in 1991 and is registered to admit 22 students between the ages of 11 and 16 years. There are currently 20 students at the school, including five girls. Two students attend part time as part of their induction to the school. Most students are looked after by their local authority. In November 1998 the Department for Children, Schools and Families granted the school approved status to admit students with statements of special educational need relating to their emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school's vision statement is 'education today creating choices tomorrow'. The school was last inspected by Ofsted in March 2006.

Evaluation of the school

The Learning Opportunities Centre provides its students with a good standard of education and care. It is a very happy place where students want to be and where they appreciate the school's motto of 'a new day is a new start'. Much has happened since the last inspection. The school was without a headteacher for some time. With the new appointment just over a year ago, the pace of improvement has picked up; successfully addressing issues raised at the last inspection and renewing the focus on the quality of the education that the school provides. Particular improvements can be seen in the curriculum and assessment. In addition, a new teaching block has enhanced the provision significantly. All regulations not met at the last inspection have been effectively tackled. There are now facilities for those who are ill, suitable toilet facilities and the prospectus now includes the relevant information for parents and carers. One regulation is now unmet. This is because the school does not send financial details to local authorities in respect of the students with statements of special educational needs.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good because the school knows the types of courses and programmes that work best to motivate students and to prepare them with what they need in order to continue their education after they leave. Accordingly, while continuing to give appropriately high profile to full and entry level GCSE courses, the curriculum provides a range of relevant opportunities to gain nationally recognised accreditations, such as those for life-skills and information and communication technology. High priority is also given to providing students with appropriate placements for work experience. This ensures maximum opportunity to maintain interest in the world of work and to develop good personal skills in the workplace.

A lot of thought has gone into the curriculum since the last inspection in response to the changing needs of the students. In September 2008 the curriculum was completely revised. This has improved the coverage of units within National Curriculum subjects so that they are most relevant ones for the students. It has also started to help teachers plan more consistently for spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of students' personal development in other subjects. Some of these plans are better developed than others at present. An audit of the curriculum using the Every Child Matters themes has successfully raised the profile of staying safe and being healthy, ensuring that learning objectives for these aspects are used in a range of lessons as appropriate. It is still early days to judge the effectiveness of some of these changes but staff are finding that the curriculum provides greater flexibility to respond to the needs and interests of individual students in both key stages. For example, improved plans, together with high staff ratios, allow for subjects to be taught in groups as small as two. As at the last inspection, individual tuition for literacy is an important part of the students' week and this approach successfully improves their self-esteem and confidence as well as their skills for reading and spelling in other lessons. A further strength of the curriculum lies in sensible links with the local area to provide regular visits, visitors and residential trips. This not only enlivens the curriculum but also provides students with opportunities to demonstrate appropriate behaviour within the wider community.

The new teaching block, opened in September 2007, has significantly enhanced the provision. Specialist rooms strengthen curricular opportunities and the general quality of the learning environment has improved. Specialist rooms are now available for design and technology, science, art and design, and food technology. There is also more space for classes to split into smaller groups.

Good teaching ensures that students make good progress from their starting points. Teaching takes place within a relaxed and purposeful atmosphere. Relationships between staff and students are very good. Students want to be in class and they settle quickly to their work. In response to suggestions made at the last inspection, learning objectives are now used to structure lessons, giving greater consistency to the planning and delivery of lessons. Sometimes these objectives focus on what will be done rather than what will be learned and the quality of lesson planning varies in quality. The involvement of students in assessing their own learning is a current area of development and this is timely. Marking is inconsistent, not always giving students

the information that they need to know how well they have done, what has helped and what they could do to improve. However staff help students to manage their behaviour very well, not only because of good relationships but also as a result of more effective use of points as rewards.

Assessment procedures and practices have improved and are now good. This is because personal skills as well as academic attainments are tracked regularly and are recorded in smaller steps so that progress can be seen more easily. Students' attainments are measured against National Curriculum levels for all subjects and with age-related expectations for reading and spelling. Assessments of students work in lessons is now more closely linked to learning objectives and the information is used well to plan future work. Information is also being used well, and much earlier than previously, to consider the most appropriate courses for students when they reach Key Stage 4. In turn, this long term approach allows for the school, together with families and outside professionals to identify relevant options for further education.

As a result of a good curriculum, delivered through good teaching, students make good progress from their starting points. By the end of Year 9, students generally reach at least National Curriculum Level 3 in English, mathematics and science, which demonstrates that they have successfully re-engaged with learning, often after extended periods out of education. All students make good progress in basic literacy skills as a result of regular individual tuition. Over the past four years all students have successfully managed the transition from school to college. All have left school with either full GCSEs or entry levels in English, mathematics, science and art. Some students achieve bronze and silver ASDAN awards (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network).

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Students develop good personal skills. Attitudes and motivation towards learning becomes increasingly positive as students progress through the school and this enables them to achieve well. Attendance improves for many students and this has a direct bearing on how well they do in class. They are able to reflect on issues in today's society as well as those relevant to their own lives and the cultures of others. Their behaviour is generally good and although they may not always behave appropriately, students are able and willing to work through their problems with staff. Behaviour on educational trips and activities is good. There have been periods since the last inspection when there were too many exclusions but these proportions have decreased during this academic year. Students are responding positively to changes to the curriculum and the revised approach to points awarded throughout the day. Students enjoy the praise and approval that they get from staff, for their behaviour as well as their work. In general, students are lively, polite and get along well with one another. They are supportive of one another, particularly when things go wrong. There is a culture of respect for others and for property. Damage to work is rare and most certainly frowned upon by friends when it happens. The school council has been reinstated this year and opportunities for students to engage with the local community have increased. Local residents were invited recently to school events and these were enjoyed and valued by all. A measure of students' success is

that by the time they leave this small secure learning environment, they have the necessary social skills to play their part within the wider community independently and to take advantages on offer to further their education at college.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The school gives appropriately high profile to welfare, health and safety, ensuring that policies and procedures cover a range of eventualities. These policies are comprehensive and very detailed. They provide staff with a range of relevant information but the most important points necessary to guide them in the event of emergencies or major concerns is lost within the detail. The proprietors systematically review all policies. This also applies to the plan for removing barriers of disability and discrimination. The plan is reviewed annually and covers a good range of accessibility and equality issues. The procedures for appointing and vetting staff meet all government requirements and the relevant training for staff in child protection has been undertaken.

The quality and range of information kept about students, meetings attended and contacts with families and professionals ensures that the staff and proprietors know the students very well. This information, together with good assessment data forms the basis of effective, ongoing professional dialogue about how to tailor the provision to best meet the needs of individual students. For example, concerns about the food that was being brought to school led to whole-sale revisions of school policy for lunches. Consequently, improved arrangements for students to eat meals prepared in school have encouraged them to think about and make healthy choices, and to prepare some of the food themselves. An appropriately high profile is also given to ensuring that the curriculum covers a suitable range of knowledge and skills to promote students' personal safety and emotional well-being.

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 the one listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide local authorities with details of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of the students that they support (paragraph 6(7)).

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:

- further monitor the quality of teaching and the curriculum in relation to a greater level of consistency in planning and delivery
- further develop the involvement of pupils in their learning so that they have a clearer understanding of how well they have done, how they learn best and what they could do to improve their work further
- revise policies for welfare, health and safety to ensure that staff have clear guidance for the most important aspects.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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School details

Name of school	Learning Opportunities Centre Secondary		
DCSF number	886/6063		
Unique reference number	119013		
Type of school	Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1991		
Age range of pupils	11–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys:14	Girls:4	Total:18
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys:1	Girls:1	Total:2
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys:15	Girls:5	Total:20
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys:8	Girls:4	Total:12
Annual fees (day pupils)	£26,714		
Address of school	Ringwould Road Ringwould Deal Kent CT14 8DW		
Telephone number	01304 381906		
Fax number	01304 381906		
Email address	lesley.buss@talk21.com		
Headteacher	Mr Simon Graydon		
Proprietor	Ms Lesley Buss		
Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI		
Dates of inspection	11 March 2009		