

The Larches School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number 884/6010
Unique reference number 117048
Inspection number 334286
Inspection dates 8 - 9 December 2009
Reporting inspector David Rzeznik HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

Age group: 11-16

Published:

Reference no: 090070

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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, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.¹

Information about the school

The Larches School is a small independent special school located on two sites in and around Leominster. The school opened in March 1996 and this is its second education inspection. It is registered for 20 pupils aged between 11 and 16 years. Currently there are 11 pupils on roll and all have severe emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. Some also have moderate learning difficulties. Seven pupils have been admitted since July 2009. All of the pupils are White British and most have a statement of special educational needs. All are looked after by various local authorities in England and Wales and are resident in a number of children's homes run by the proprietors. All pupils have had a disrupted education which has adversely affected their attainment and self-esteem. One of the proprietors oversees the work of the school but is not in school full-time. The school is run on a daily basis by two senior teachers.

The school aims *'to be a place in which pupils are given opportunities to become confident learners in a caring environment, where they are supported and encouraged to achieve personal success both now and in the future. The Larches values all individuals attending and celebrates learning'*.

Evaluation of the school

The Larches School provides a satisfactory standard of education. Teaching and assessment are satisfactory. Provision enables pupils to make at least satisfactory academic progress and good progress in improving their behaviour. The curriculum covers all of the required areas of learning but it does not ensure that the requirements specified in all pupils' statements of special educational needs are fully met. Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory and regulatory requirements are met. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The vast majority of weaknesses identified by the last inspection have been remedied. For example, the school has policies for all aspects of welfare, health and safety and nearly all of the required information is supplied to parents and others. The school meets most but not all of the regulatory requirements for independent schools.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

Quality of education

The overall quality of education is satisfactory. The curriculum is satisfactory and all of the required areas of learning are taught. There is rightly a strong emphasis on improving pupils' behaviour, a pre-requisite for learning. A good feature is that all subjects taught lead to accredited qualifications that have currency in the adult world. Pupils welcome gaining success at GCSE and Entry Level in a broad range of subjects. The newly introduced vocational course in carpentry and work-based training in construction, hairdressing, animal and child care also lead to recognised qualifications. The school has also just introduced accredited functional skills and sports courses to enrich the curriculum.

There is a written curriculum policy that spells out the curriculum entitlement for pupils at each key stage. Schemes of work exist for most but not all subjects. There are no schemes of work for music, citizenship, information and communication technology or for a modern foreign language. Incidental learning opportunities exist in most of these subjects. For instance, a music workshop has been provided. Pupils use information and communication technology as a learning tool, for example, when they produce a spreadsheet as part of their Fantasy Football project or to present written work. Aspects of citizenship are taught through other subjects, but there is no audit of planning or monitoring of coverage so senior staff are unsure what is taught and when. There is no provision of a modern foreign language although the prospectus says French is taught. Some pupils have statements that prescribe that the full National Curriculum is taught. The school recognises that provision does not always ensure a full National Curriculum entitlement because some subjects are not taught in sufficient depth or at all.

There is a broad programme of personal, social and health education, with a suitable emphasis on topics such as financial capability, emotional awareness and drugs education. Pupils in Key Stage 3 have contact with a careers officer and appropriate career action plans are drawn up. Staff respond to pupils' career interests by organising talks, for instance, about jobs in the army. All pupils have work experience when they are ready for it. They also acquire enterprise skills when they raise funds, for example, by running a car wash.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory. Provision enables pupils to make at least satisfactory progress academically and good progress in improving their behaviour. The school has recently introduced new planning and assessment systems to accelerate pupils' progress so that gaps in their learning are closed. At the time of the last inspection the school lacked a suitable assessment framework. This weakness has been remedied. Robust external procedures are in place to verify standards achieved in accredited courses. Pupils' basic skills are suitably assessed on entry and the information gained is generally used well to match work to pupils' capabilities. This said, at times teachers expectations are not high enough and individuals sometimes learn things that they already know so mark time rather than being stretched. In history too many worksheets are used and this restricts opportunities for independent learning and recording. Where teaching is good it is primarily because work is challenging and the activities interest and engage the

pupils so they give of their best. Lessons move along at a cracking pace and the time flies by. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure and consistent approaches are used to control pupils' behaviour. Staff continue to avoid confrontation successfully and remain calm when dealing with anti-social incidents. All pupils are given two, weekly targets and progress against them is regularly reviewed. Homework is set but inconsistent practices in the children's homes mean that it is not always completed. Marking is inconsistent. Resources are adequate and the new computers are being used effectively, however, some old computers still remain in use.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The school continues to build up pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence through its continued focus on rewarding good behaviour and achievement. Behaviour is good and much improved from that seen at the time of admission. Pupils have developed good relationships with staff and most new arrivals have settled in well. Pupils are learning to recognise and deal with their emotions effectively and their attitude to school work is generally positive. Half say they enjoy school and half say they do not. Many would prefer to live at home rather than in a children's home. Attendance varies from week to week but is satisfactory overall. Work in religious education and food technology gives pupils a sound understanding of cultural diversity and respect for their own and other cultures. While pupils learn incidentally about where to go in the local community for certain services, the lack of planning for citizenship means that they do not have a good enough understanding about public services. Work experience and vocational studies provide pupils with a good insight into the world of work. Pupils make a positive contribution to the school community through developing school rules and developing plans for a much-needed common room. While pupils raise funds for charities there are too few opportunities for them to make a difference in the local and global community.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. The anti-bullying and behaviour management policies are of good quality and are effectively implemented. As a result, bullying is rare and pupils' behaviour is good. Physical restraint procedures are clear and all incidents are suitably recorded. The last report judged that the high number of physical restraints was a concern. The use of physical restraint has dropped dramatically and is at an acceptable level. Adequate procedures are in place to safeguard pupils' safety and welfare, including the required staff training for child protection. The school promotes a healthy lifestyle but a number of pupils do not adopt one by choosing to smoke during and after school. Some pupils say they would like more guidance about how to keep healthy.

The last time the school was inspected the school did not have a written health and safety policy, first aid policy or guidance for activities outside the school. Sound policies have been produced for all three areas. This said, the health and safety policy is not fully implemented. An electrical equipment register is kept but it is not

up-to-date. Not all portable electrical equipment is subject to testing by a qualified person. Robust risk assessments are carried out for off-site activities and accidents are appropriately recorded. The last inspection report stated that a fire risk assessment was not carried out. This weakness has been remedied and adequate fire safety procedures are adopted. The admission register does not contain all of the required information. An emergency contact telephone number for parents or guardians is missing. The school has developed an accessibility plan which complies with Disability Discrimination Act legislation. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school undertakes all of the required checks on the proprietors and staff to ensure their suitability to work with children. The single central register contains all of the necessary information and it can be reproduced in a legible form.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are satisfactory. They enable at least satisfactory teaching, learning and care. Most of the teaching is carried out in Leominster in former residential accommodation that has been suitably adapted for educational use. Since the last inspection the annex in Hereford has closed. The school now has a food technology facility about five miles from the main school, which pupils travel to each week. Accommodation here is good.

Classrooms vary in size but are adequate for the small number on roll. The school does not have appropriate facilities for those who are ill. There is sufficient outdoor space for play and recreation and the school makes good use of sports facilities in the locality. The premises are clean, tidy and in generally good decorative order.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

At the time of the last inspection the school did not provide, or make available to parents and others, all of the required information. The prospectus has been suitably updated and all of the necessary information is now supplied to parents and carers. However, one piece of information is not provided to local authorities. The school does not submit to each local authority, and on request to the Secretary of State, an annual account of the income received and expenditure incurred by the school for those pupils funded by the local authority. This weakness was also identified by the last inspection. The school provides good quality reports on pupils with a statement of special educational need, to the responsible local authority, for the purpose of the annual review of the statement.

Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints procedure meets regulatory requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.²

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

- produce and implement schemes of work for all subjects, including music, ICT, citizenship and for any modern foreign language taught (paragraph 1(2))
- ensure that where pupils have a statement of special educational need, the education provided fulfils its requirements, particularly with regard to ensuring National Curriculum requirements are met (paragraph 1(2)(e)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (standard 2) and must:

- ensure that all pupils are provided with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England and the wider world (paragraph 2(d)).

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

- ensure that an up-to-date electrical register is kept and all portable electrical items are subject to regular inspection and testing by a qualified person and outcomes are formally recorded (paragraph 3(4))
- maintain an admission register in accordance with regulations (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill (paragraph 5(l)).

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

- ensure that the school submits to each local authority, and on request to the Secretary of State, an annual account of the income received and the

² www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

expenditure incurred by the school for those pupils wholly or partly funded by the local authority (paragraph 6(8)).

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	The Larches School		
DCSF number	884/6010		
Unique reference number	117048		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	March 1996		
Age range of pupils	11-16 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 7	Girls: 4	Total: 11
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 7	Girls: 1	Total: 8
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 7	Girls: 4	Total: 11
Annual fees (day pupils)	£31,200		
Address of school	Coningsby Road Leominster Herefordshire HR6 8LL		
Telephone number	0845 6182684		
Fax number	01568 610279		
Email address	thelarches@clifford-house.co.uk		
Head of Service	Linda Gresty		
Proprietors	Nicklas Nenadich, John Brierley, Linda Gresty		
Reporting inspector	David Rzeznik HMI		
Dates of inspection	8 to 9 December 2009		