

Flexible Learning Centre

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	330/6128
Unique Reference Number (URN)	135561
Inspection number	334320
Inspection dates	16–17 March 2010
Reporting inspector	David Rzeznik HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², 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.

Information about the school

The Flexible Learning Centre is an independent day school that is located on three sites in different parts of Birmingham. The headteacher is the proprietor and owner of the school. The school opened in September 2008 and this is its first inspection. The school provides an alternative education for students aged from 14 to 16 years. Its main aim is to help students to overcome any disadvantages and disaffection in order to achieve their full potential. Eighty one students are enrolled. Half attend full time and the rest part time. A significant number of students are dually registered. They attend the centre and are also on the roll of local secondary schools.

The intake of the school is multiracial and the vast majority of students have been admitted since September 2009. None has a statement of special educational needs. The vast majority of the students has personal, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that have resulted in them not doing as well as they could at school. The majority of staff have been appointed in the last seven months.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education is satisfactory. The school meets most but not all of the regulatory requirements for independent schools. The overall provision for students' welfare, health and safety is inadequate, primarily because safeguarding procedures are not robust enough. Teaching, assessment and the curriculum are satisfactory. Provision ensures students make at least satisfactory progress developing their basic skills and good progress in modifying their behaviour, which is good.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory. Entry Level and GCSE courses in English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology are studied by all students. The school is right to concentrate its efforts on getting students to gain qualifications in the basic skills so that they can gain access to further education or employment. While the school covers all areas of learning, some students would like to do drama, dance and more sport, to increase their enjoyment of learning. No

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

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

extra-curricular opportunities are provided. Students say they would like more visits and after-school activities to broaden their horizons. Inspectors agree, but acknowledge the financial constraints the school is working under and that referring agencies and schools are not prepared to pay for such experiences.

Schemes of work are in place for all of the subjects taught, but they are of variable quality and do not provide a good overview of the curriculum provided in each subject. The timetable is blocked into half-day subject sessions, broken up with suitable breaks. This structure enables students to concentrate on activities for extended periods of time. Students say that they like studying for longer periods because this enables them to complete tasks and to see the results of their efforts. The core curriculum is supplemented with a satisfactory programme of personal, social and health education, which in Year 11 enables students to gain a GCSE qualification in citizenship. In Year 11, additional GCSE subjects are covered, including business studies and travel and tourism. However, take-up of these subjects is at the discretion of the referring agencies and does not always result in viable numbers. All students have one session of physical education per week to keep them fit and healthy. Careers education is provided and students have access to individual careers counselling. However, some students report that the quality of careers education varies too much and advice is not always helpful or targeted to their specific needs.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory. Students make at least satisfactory progress in developing their basic skills and good progress improving their behaviour and self-esteem. Students like being taught in small classes where they get one-to-one support to close gaps in their learning; help to modify their behaviour and support to manage any personal difficulties they may be experiencing. Support workers visit lessons and ensure students have the resources they need and behave well. However, they are not sufficiently involved in supporting academic learning. Teaching is characterised by good relationships between adults and students. Behaviour management is good therefore learning is not disrupted. A good feature is the sharing of lesson objectives at the start of lessons so students know what must be achieved. In the most effective lessons, work is challenging and students are involved in discussion to clarify their thinking and are encouraged to think deeply about the concepts being taught. Activities are interesting and there is good one-to-one support to move students' learning on. Where teaching is satisfactory it is mainly because expectations are not high enough; therefore students consolidate their learning rather than being stretched. A sound range of assessment procedures are in place. Students take GCSE and other accredited examinations that are externally marked. Students' literacy and numeracy skills are suitably assessed on entry and the information gained is used effectively to place students on the most appropriate course. Marking is inconsistent. When evaluating work, teachers are not paying sufficient attention to improving students' spelling, handwriting and presentation skills that are hindering success.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students say that they enjoy coming to school. Staff and school activities make a very good impact boosting students' self-confidence and self-esteem. Students behave well and have positive attitudes to learning. However, attendance is unsatisfactory and too many students do not come to school often enough, or on time. Irregular attendance is hindering students' progress and they are not getting into good habits to cope with further education or employment. Racial harmony is an important strength and students from different backgrounds show respect and tolerance to each other. Provision enables students to acquire a sound appreciation and respect for cultural and religious diversity and a basic knowledge of public institutions and services in England. Students are not given enough opportunity to make a difference in the school or wider community.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The overall provision for the welfare, health and safety of students is inadequate. This is because procedures to safeguard them are inadequate.

A written child protection policy is in place but it is out-of-date and is not implemented effectively. For example, staff vetting procedures are not robust enough and staff appointed in January 2010 have not received adequate child protection training. The child protection policy indicates the role of the governing body in proceedings but governors no longer exist. Therefore, the procedure for dealing with a child protection allegation against the designated person is unclear.

The school's health and safety policy, including the guidance for activities outside school, is not comprehensive enough and not fully implemented. For example, there is no electrical equipment register and not all portable electrical equipment has been subject to inspection by a qualified person. Fire risk assessments have been carried out on all three sites but the fire alarm and electrical lighting systems have not been inspected, tested and serviced within recommended timescales on at least two sites. The first aid policy is satisfactory but the school does not ensure a qualified first-aider is on each site at all times. Attendance registers are kept in good order. The admission register is not fully compliant. It does not always specify the name and address of the last school students attended. Behaviour and anti-bullying policies are of good quality and are implemented well. As a result, behaviour is good and students are free from harassment. There is no written three-year action plan indicating how the school will fulfil its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) legislation.

The school helps students understand sexual health risks and the dangers of drugs. Individual support and counselling helps boost students' mental and emotional well-

being. Students do not always adopt a healthy lifestyle with some choosing to smoke out of school and many eat unhealthy snacks at break times.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Procedures for vetting staff are insufficiently robust, because the school is not following government safeguarding guidance closely enough. All of the required checks have been carried out on the headteacher to confirm her suitability to work with children. All staff have been subject to an enhanced check by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). The vast majority of CRB checks have been carried out by other agencies and not the school. For some individuals the checks were done a while ago. The school has too readily accepted past CRB vetting without checking that staff have had continuity of employment. Some have had breaks in employment of more than three months, and this cannot guarantee that no criminal convictions have been made since the last CRB check was carried out. Some staff with breaks in service should have been vetted again before being employed, in line with government requirements.

Before appointing staff the school carries out appropriate checks to confirm their identity, medical fitness, qualifications and right to work in the United Kingdom (UK). The school does check individuals' previous employment history but breaks in service are not checked thoroughly enough. A single central register is kept but it is not fully compliant. For example, those staff who have not had continuity of employment should have been CRB vetted again and the outcome of the check recorded in the register.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation vary in quality but are satisfactory overall. The newly refurbished accommodation in Hockley is of good quality. Provision enables satisfactory teaching and learning and the premises keep students safe. All accommodation has been suitably adapted for educational use. The Pype Hayes site has adequate outdoor space for play and recreation but the Erdington and Hockley sites do not. All classrooms are of an appropriate size for the small numbers using them and there are sufficient toilet facilities for students and adults in each location. Classrooms and communal areas are maintained in a clean and tidy condition.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school prospectus and website contain most, but not all of the required information for parents and others. The areas of non-compliance are listed below. Parents and others are provided with useful information about school rules, attendance and programmes of study to inform them about the school's working practices. The school does not provide an annual written report to parents in accordance with requirements. Instead parents receive a monthly report about their

children's attainment, including current and target grades, attendance and effort. However, the reports do not say enough about individuals' progress in the subjects taught.

Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints procedure meets 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.³

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

- improve the quality of the child protection policy and ensure it is implemented effectively, and ensure all staff are appropriately trained to fulfil their child protection duties (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- improve the policy relating to the health and safety of students on activities outside school and ensure risk assessments are undertaken for all educational visits or trips off-site (paragraph 3(2)(c))
- improve the quality of the school's health and safety policy and ensure it pays regard to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) guidance, and ensure an electrical equipment register is kept and all portable appliances are subject to regular inspection by a qualified person (paragraph 3(4))
- ensure the fire alarm and emergency lighting equipment is inspected, tested and serviced within the recommended timescales (paragraph 3(5))
- ensure that at all times at least one qualified first-aider is on every site occupied by the school (paragraph 3(6))
- ensure that the admission register is maintained in accordance with regulations (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- ensure that prior to being appointed all staff have been subject to a CRB check at an enhanced level and for those who do not have continuity of employment since they were last CRB vetted, ensure the

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

headteacher/proprietor carries out a new CRB check to confirm their suitability to work with children (paragraph 4(2)(b))

- ensure that the single central register records for each member of staff in post on or after 1 September 2003 the checks made of their identity (and the date on which the check was made), their qualifications (where required and the date of the check), whether an enhanced CRB was obtained (and the date the check was completed or certificate obtained, and where appropriate check the individual's right to work in the UK to ensure that the person is not working in contravention of section 142 of the Education Act 2002 (paragraph 4C (2and 3)).

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

- provide adequate outside space in every school location for recreation and play (paragraph 5(t)).

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 makes available and informs parents and prospective parents that they can request:
 - particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(3)(e))
 - details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(3)(f))
- publish on the school website or send to parents of students (and to prospective parents on request) a copy of the school's safeguarding children policy (paragraph 6(4))
- provide parents with an annual written report of the progress and attainment made by each student in the main subjects taught (paragraph 6(6)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.⁴

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/ukpga_19950050_en_1

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 students			✓	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of students' needs			✓	
How well students make progress in their learning			✓	

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

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

Welfare, health and safety of students

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

Name of school	Flexible Learning Centre		
DCSF number	330/6128		
Unique reference number (URN)	135561		
Type of school	Secondary		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 2008		
Age range of students	14–16 years		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full time students)	Boys: 23	Girls: 15	Total: 38
Number on roll (part time students)	Boys: 35	Girls: 8	Total: 43
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 2	Total: 2
Annual fees (students)	£8.50 an hour for full timers (25 hours) £9.00 an hour for part timers (less than 25 hours)		
Address of school	204 Slade Road Erdington Birmingham B23 7RJ		
Telephone number	0121 240 3718		
Fax number	0121 241 2193		
Email address	shamim@flexiblelearning.org.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Shamim Akhtar		
Proprietor	Ms Shamin Akhtar		
Reporting inspector	David Rzeknik		
Dates of inspection	16–17 March 2010		