

The Linnet Independent Learning Centre

Independent Special School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	830/6033
Unique Reference Number	131327
Inspection number	342377
Inspection dates	1 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Sue Aldridge

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 students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding students and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

The Linnet Independent Learning Centre is a small independent special school in Derbyshire for students with behavioural, emotional, social and/or some learning difficulties. Although it is registered for girls and boys from 9 to 16, all seven students currently on the roll are boys aged between 11 and 16. All are of White British heritage and have statements of special educational needs. Three students are in the care of local authorities. Students arrive at the centre with attainment levels well below those expected at their age because they have had disrupted education, often including periods of exclusion resulting from their violent behaviour. Each student has an individual curriculum and is taught individually for most of the week.

The centre aims 'to empower students to realise their intellectual and social potential by presenting a mainstream curriculum and community responsibilities in a manner that enables individuals to understand that their experiences are relevant, their feelings validated and their contributions important.'

The centre opened in February 2006 and was last inspected in December 2006.

Evaluation of the school

The Linnet Independent Learning Centre provides a good quality of education and it meets its aims well. The nurturing environment, high quality teamwork and individual learning programmes for each student are the keys to its success in ensuring that all students make good progress. Students' life chances improve considerably while they are at the centre and they leave well prepared for the next step. There has been good improvement since the last inspection and the centre continues to meet all the regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. It reflects well the National Curriculum and is suitably modified to match students' ages and abilities as well as the provision prescribed on their statements of special educational needs. Curriculum planning, carried out in teams of teachers and support assistants, is good, and achieves a high degree of personalisation for each student. Good account is taken of each student's needs, interests, learning styles and preferences. Each student has an individual learning and care plan, which identifies a series of challenging targets for them over the period of a year. This is reviewed termly and is colour coded to show which targets have been achieved, thus providing a useful visual record of achievement. This is an improvement since the last inspection and has helped to achieve greater consistency in reports to parents.

Staff are successful in making learning relevant, for instance by tackling topical issues as they arise. Careful monitoring ensures that this flexibility does not compromise each student's entitlement. Organisation of students into groups has improved since the last inspection. Students enjoy the twice weekly carousels, when they move individually through a series of different subject sessions planned around themes. They particularly like being taught individually, although there are sufficient opportunities for them to work in pairs, small groups and teams. The layout of the premises supports the curriculum well, with a large kitchen that is used for breakfast and lunch each day, a group room for meetings, a relaxation room and five workshop areas where particular activities take place. The grounds are used effectively to provide areas for activity, gardening, and quiet reflection. Physical education is taught off the centre's site, making suitable use of leisure and fitness centres.

There is a good quality programme of personal, social and health education, (PSHE) incorporating careers education, religious education and citizenship. Following earlier difficulties in linking with the Connexions services in several local authorities, students now have individual sessions with a local specialist Connexions adviser, and the centre is keen to develop this link further. There are mutually beneficial links with a local college, where students from the centre are able to socialise with others in organising an annual Children in Need event, as well as becoming familiar with college routines when they attend a first aid course. Similar links are made with colleges close to students' homes. All students undertake work experience, for which they are remunerated on a performance-related pay model, and they save a portion of their earnings in an account held by the centre. There is a satisfactory range of accreditation to cater for students' abilities, including unit awards, Entry Level courses and the Youth Award Scheme. Students leave well prepared for the next step in their lives.

Teaching and assessment are good. Staff make effective use of both informal assessments when students enter the centre and the information that is provided, such as their statements. Tasks are planned that are well matched to students' abilities. Lessons are jointly planned by qualified teachers and support assistants, and are taught equally well by both.

The most significant strength of lessons is the excellent quality of relationships between staff and students. There is a most effective balance of trust and respect, and staff manage students sensitively and skilfully. Students know that they are in lessons to learn and they engage well in the activities provided, which they often enjoy. A good range of resources is used to help bring learning to life, including information and communication technology. A weekly visit is firmly linked to themes, such as a visit to Cadbury World to learn about Fairtrade chocolate. Visitors are also welcomed into the centre, to talk about their beliefs for example. Each lesson is planned in three parts, with a series of brief assessment questions at the end to test students' knowledge and understanding. However, staff do not always leave sufficient time for this or involve students in a way that leaves them with a sense of achievement and an understanding of what they might do to improve. Nonetheless, staff assess students' performance thoroughly and maintain detailed records of their progress that testify to the good progress made by all. In almost all cases students make at least one level gain in each year at the centre and they achieve almost all of the challenging targets set for them. While the centre evaluates the achievements of individuals, it does not yet collate these to give an overall picture, such as the proportion of targets met by students.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Because students are so well supported they make good improvements in their behaviour and emotional adjustment. Their relationships with their key workers and other staff are the cornerstone to growing confidence in themselves, as they are given regular praise and encouragement as well as recognition for their successes. Most are cooperative and compliant and show enthusiasm for their learning. Students learn to deal effectively with their feelings of anger by withdrawing to a relaxation room, then returning to lessons. They learn steadily to work alongside one another, and to approach tasks that they have previously lacked confidence in completing. They are better able to accept criticism.

A good programme of PSHE gives them a broad moral grounding. They readily accept the rules and sanctions of the centre and respect the periods of silent reflection offered during the morning meeting. Their behaviour in the centre is good, as is their attendance. Although the latter is adversely affected by a small number of students, absence is most often for medical reasons.

Students have a good understanding of how society works, such as how services are provided, how democracy works and what are the laws of the land. There are good opportunities for students to take responsibility, such as being the weekly centre captain. They contribute well to the centre and to wider communities by recycling, growing vegetables, looking after animals and representing the centre in competitions.

Students learn about the customs and cultures of others and show respect for those from ethnic minorities. Visits and visitors from other religions widen their experiences and foster tolerance.

They also celebrate cultural diversity through themed days, when they learn something of other languages and sample foods from different lands.

Safeguarding students' welfare, health and safety

Students' welfare, health and safety are good. There is good training for staff in all aspects of care, welfare and safety including physical intervention, first aid and child protection. Students' individual behaviour management plans identify triggers, strategies for dealing with outbursts and calming down procedures for each individual. Detailed risk assessments, including those for individuals, ensure that students are safe on and off the premises. There are comprehensive health and safety checks, procedures for minimising the risk of fire and dealing with an outbreak. Students are taught effectively about how to keep themselves safe, including how to resist peer pressure. Bullying is not a feature of the centre and supervision is excellent. As a result, students feel safe. The centre provides an environment of excellent quality, including grounds that offer both stimulation and tranquillity in different areas, giving students a sense of well-being. The Eco Schools Award and National Healthy Schools status recognise the school's work. Staff encourage students to follow a healthy diet and to take regular exercise. Students have an exceptionally positive relationship with their key workers, who really go the extra mile, giving continuity of support throughout their time at the centre, including making home visits when necessary. The centre has a suitable three-year plan showing how it will improve provision for disabled people. Arrangements for safeguarding students meet requirements. The centre ensures that all staff are checked appropriately before they commence employment. However, a small number of adjustments need to be made to the safer recruitment policy and procedures so that these fully reflect recent legislative requirements. The need for these adjustments resulted from a lack of awareness of the precise detail of the requirements and presented no risk to students.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the centre might wish to consider the following points for development:

- provide students with a clear sense of what they have achieved in lessons and what they need to do to improve
- collate the data on the progress made by individual students to give statistical information that shows how successful the centre is.

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 Linnet Independent Learning Centre		
DCSF number	830/6033		
Unique reference number	131327		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	23 February 2006		
Age range of students	9–16		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 7	Girls: 0	Total: 7
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 7	Girls: 0	Total: 7
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Annual fees (day students)	£72,500		
Address of school	107 Mount Pleasant Road Castle Gresley Derbyshire DE11 9JE		
Telephone number	01283 213989/01530 560775		
Fax number	01283 213989		
Email address	linnet1@btconnect.com		
Headteacher	Ms Jan Sullivan		
Proprietor	Lewis Charlton Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Sue Aldridge		
Dates of inspection	1 July 2009		