

Learning Opportunities Centre Secondary

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Mike Thirkell

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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, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

Learning Opportunities Centre is an independent day secondary special school situated on two relatively close sites, both former village schools, in the countryside near to Dover. The school, which opened in 1991, is registered with the Department for Education to provide education for up to 30 students from 11 to 18 years of age. There are 21 boys and girls attending currently on roll. All students have a statement of special educational needs and are placed at the school by several local education authorities. All have emotional and behavioural difficulties and moderate learning difficulties and have a history of disrupted education, including extended periods out of school. Half of the students are currently looked after children living in residential homes or foster placements. Most students attend full time. The school's aim is to provide its students with, 'a safe and happy environment in which to learn'. It was last inspected in March 2009.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education is good and teachers and students of all ages make good progress. The school meets its aim of providing students with a safe and happy environment in which to learn and they say that they enjoy being at the school; parents support this view. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good supported by a wide range of opportunities for students to acquire personal as well as academic skills. Behaviour is good. Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good and arrangements for safeguarding are thorough. The overall quality of education has improved since the last inspection and the school now meets all of the requirements for registration as an independent school.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. The curriculum is set out in a clear policy and supported by published schemes of work and teachers' plans for all subjects. Though long- and medium-term planning is good overall, medium-term plans, on occasions, have insufficient detail, particularly in relation to cross-curricular links related to personal, social and health education (PSHE). Provision for each student is planned carefully to meet their individual personal as well as learning needs, including those specified by their statement of special educational needs. Students of all ages and

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

abilities have access to all the required areas of learning and experience. Courses for students, including through GCSE and Life Skills accreditation, provide a range of qualifications relevant to their needs and which support their personal development as well as providing access to future training.

Provision for improving students' skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy is good, supported by a careful evaluation of individual need. The development of speaking skills is supported by encouraging students to participate in discussions and to express their views. Assisted by the school's clear expectations for good behaviour and small classes, students quickly develop the ability to listen, aided by the example of teachers who listen to what they have to say. Literacy and numeracy are developed well through the curriculum as well as through English and mathematics lessons. Additional one-to-one support is provided outside the classroom for improving literacy and communication skills for some students.

Provision for students' personal development is good. PSHE is provided throughout the curriculum, through tutor time each morning and through visits by the school nurse and visitors such as a local police officer. Careers education is provided through the PSHE programme and supported by the local Connexions service. Students in Years 10 and 11 have good opportunities for work experience. Year 11 students begin to develop a view of career pathways supported by visits to local colleges and guidance provided by Connexions. The school uses very effective systems for supporting the transfer of students into further education. This process plays an important part in their preparation for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

Students appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities available, which include basketball, football, swimming, diving, horse riding and working towards Duke of Edinburgh awards in a range of areas. One Year 10 student who had previously not enjoyed sport emphasised how the school had encouraged him successfully to take part in physical education and games activities.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. The quality of teaching is sometimes outstanding. As a result, students of all ages and abilities make at least good progress and some make outstanding progress. Teachers display competence in the subjects they teach and are experienced in supporting students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. They are assisted by teaching assistants who understand their role well and play a full and effective part in lessons. The vast majority of lessons are planned and structured well which ensures that learning progresses at a good pace. Teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the students, which is facilitated by the accessible information provided by the school.

In general, resources, in particular computers, are used effectively by teachers to support learning although occasionally, the use of software resources is not planned with sufficient care. Relationships between teachers and their students are invariably good. The small size of classes ensures ongoing discussion between teachers and

students. Questioning is used well to challenge students to think independently and to encourage those who are less able or confident to express their ideas. Teachers utilise effective strategies for managing behaviour and encourage students successfully to act responsibly.

The quality of assessment is good, supported by a clear framework and policy. The school has a carefully designed admissions process for new students, which includes a thorough review of previous learning and attainments. Guidance in developing the provision for each student is derived from a range of sources, including educational psychologists' reports, statements from previous schools, school reports and testing. During a six-week induction into the school, reading and literacy tests are used and at the end of this period all students are given National Curriculum levels. Good records of students' progress are maintained, supported by the effective strategies for passing information to teachers about each student's personal and academic needs. Marking is regular but the quality of written feedback on students' work sometimes gives insufficient guidance on what has been done well and what needs to be improved. It is inconsistencies such as this as well the occasional lesson that is not so well planned that prevent teaching and students' progress from being outstanding.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The quality of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Tutor sessions provide good opportunities for students to discuss their feelings and emotions. This is a key factor in the support provided to students, including helping them to settle into college courses. Good support for students to gain confidence and raise their self-esteem is provided through the positive learning atmosphere in lessons and the effective use of praise and encouragement. As a result, most students develop a positive attitude to learning. Teachers' consistent expectations with respect to behaviour encourage students to distinguish right from wrong. Teachers set good examples through their own actions and fair treatment of students. Behaviour is good and students indicate that they understand clearly the consequences of poor behaviour and that they would be challenged to consider the impact of their actions on others. They are encouraged to be responsible for their behaviour through a points system which rewards good behaviour and positive responses. Attendance is good.

Students make a positive contribution to community life in the school through the school council. They have supported the local community, for example, by helping to organise Christmas lunches for people in their local village and helping to clear areas of rare chalk downland. They have supported the wider community by collecting money for charities, for example the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, Sports Relief and Children in Need, through events and long distance runs. They develop a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England through the contribution of the local police and fire and rescue service, visits to a local church and museums and galleries. They develop a knowledge of other cultures through

projects in art and geography, including in relation to Japanese and aboriginal art. They are encouraged to respect and to live in harmony with other cultures through celebrating Commonwealth Day, the European day of Languages and understanding the celebration of Yom Kippur (the Jewish Day of Atonement).

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. Good arrangements are in place for safeguarding students, including the correct completion of security checks on new staff. This is supported by appropriate guidance and training for new staff on child protection, through induction procedures and very clear information in the staff handbook. The school maintains a full range of the required policies, including for child-protection, behaviour, anti-bullying, health and safety (including fire safety) and first aid. All policies are fully implemented and reviewed regularly. Appropriate training has been completed by staff at the required level in child protection and first aid. As a result, all staff have a good understanding of safeguarding requirements.

Good strategies for dealing with any instances of bullying or poor behaviour are in place, confirmed by students' views. Appropriate records are maintained of sanctions imposed for instances of poor behaviour, incidents and fire drills. All matters relating to fire protection are in order and procedures and appliances regularly checked by professional bodies. Healthy food, including fruit, provided for students during the day and a wide range of sports ensure that students are kept healthy. Admissions and attendance registers are well maintained. A suitable accessibility plan has been prepared which meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The single central register of staff checks contains all the required information. Files maintained containing staff details confirm that the required checks have been undertaken.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school's premises and accommodation are maintained in good order, are well decorated, secure and well lit and ventilated and have adequate outdoor space. The quality of buildings and grounds adds much to the quality of students' learning experience. There are specialist rooms for art, ceramics, science, gardening, woodwork and information and communication technology. Buildings provide good access for all students and the school has the means to adapt to the access needs should any physically disabled pupils wish to join the school. All classrooms are of suitable size and well furnished and there are suitable hygienic facilities for lunch and preparing food. Washrooms are adequate in number and there is a suitable sick room on each site.

Provision of information

The school provides all the required information to parents, prospective parents and carers through its prospectus, website and handbooks for parents, carers and students. Reports on pupils are of good quality and are provided regularly. Annual reviews of statements of special educational needs are appropriately completed as are the records of expenditure prepared for placing authorities.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The procedures for handling complaints meet the requirements in all respects.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets all The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Ensure that medium-term curriculum plans provide sufficient detail in relation to cross-curricular links, especially PSHE.
- Ensure that there is always sufficient written feedback on students' work which gives guidance on what has been done well and how to improve.
- Ensure that the use of software is always well planned.

Inspection judgements

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

School status	Independent day		
Type of school	Special school		
Date school opened	April 1991		
Age range of pupils	11–18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 18	Girls: 3	Total: 21
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 18	Girls: 3	Total: 21
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 9	Girls: 2	Total: 11
Annual fees (day pupils)	£28,787 – £29,273		
Address of school	Learning Opportunities Centre Secondary Ringwould Road Ringwould Deal Kent CT14 8DW		
Telephone number	01304 381906		
Email address	locringwould@live.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Simon Graydon		
Proprietor	Lesley Buss		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



17 May 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Learning Opportunities Centre, Deal, CT14 8DW

As you know, I visited the school recently to undertake an inspection of the educational provision. I was pleased to meet a number of you and to hear that you have positive views about your school and that you believe you are making progress with your work. I noted that your behaviour was good and that you enjoy your lessons.

I think that the quality of education that you receive is good and that your teachers work hard to make lessons interesting. I know you have not always had good experiences at school in the past or have missed time in education. Nevertheless, my view is that you are making good progress now, supported by the good teaching that you receive. The curriculum is good and the range of subjects and activities available gives you good opportunities to learn and develop skills, as well as to develop confidence in your own abilities. The support that older students receive in moving on to college courses is a very important and helpful feature of the school. All things that relate to your welfare, health and safety are dealt with well.

I have suggested to the school that it might consider improving some aspects of planning of the subjects you learn. I have also suggested that you should get better feedback on your work, so that you always know what you need to do to improve.

With every good wish for your future success and happiness.

Yours sincerely

Mike Thirkell
Lead inspector