

Blackford Education (Schools) Ltd T/A the Libra School

Edgemoor Court, South Radworthy, South Molton, Devon EX36 3LN

Inspection dates

13–15 November 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The new leadership team has high expectations for pupils and staff. As a result, pupils receive a good standard of education. Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development and welfare, because they are central to all that the school does. Leaders pay close attention to developing pupils' skills in managing their behaviour. Behaviour is good.
- Good teaching across the school ensures that lessons are organised and well resourced. Occasionally, planning does not build on pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are very strong. As a result, pupils develop confidence and feel safe in the school. Safeguarding arrangements are of high quality, and pupils are supported effectively in keeping themselves safe.
- Staff are trained effectively to work with pupils' range of special educational needs. They know pupils very well and are consistent in their approach. Pupils have confidence that they will be treated fairly.
- The rich curriculum is focused on each pupil's individual needs. It provides a good range of experiences that support pupils both academically and in their personal development.
- The therapy team understands pupils' needs extremely well and uses this knowledge effectively to devise programmes that build on pupils' skills.
- Staff meet regularly to consider the progress of each individual pupil. They take quick action to help pupils make good progress in their learning. However, leaders are not using all the information they keep about pupils' progress and groups of pupils to check regularly the impact of their actions on pupils' outcomes.
- The headteacher and directors know their school well and have made a good start to bringing about improvements. Directors recognise the need to support new leaders' professional development and extend their leadership skills.
- Parents and carers are overwhelmingly confident about the school and all it has done for their children.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve leadership and management by:
 - strengthening and developing new leadership so that the school continues to improve
 - checking the impact of actions to strengthen the quality of education provided to pupils and groups of pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by making effective use of teachers' good knowledge of pupils to plan work that builds on pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher, directors and senior leaders have good capacity to move the school forward. The headteacher and her team are determined to provide a high standard of education. The strong sense of 'team' that exists across the school ensures that all staff are on side in supporting leaders to achieve their goals. Leaders have ensured that the independent school standards are met.
- Leaders are committed to ensuring that the school's vision is met for every pupil. Staff are experienced in working with the range of special educational needs within the school. Their knowledge is used very effectively to develop pupils' personal and social skills.
- Leaders are clear about their roles and responsibilities, and the leadership team works well together. There is strength and stability in the team, although some leaders are new to this level of responsibility and are settling into their roles. The headteacher and directors recognise this and are planning to extend supervision and provide further support, to develop leaders' skills.
- Systems for monitoring the work of the school enable leaders to have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Leaders use the wide range of information regarding pupil achievements to check the progress and outcomes for each individual. However, leaders are not yet routinely checking the impact of the school's work on the outcomes for pupils as a whole and also for groups of pupils.
- Leaders check the quality of teaching regularly. As a result, the school has implemented a consistent approach to well-established practices. Some very good initiatives have been introduced recently. For example, staff now receive individual and focused feedback following lesson observations. This work is in the process of being embedded into teaching across the school. Leaders have supported new staff effectively, and staff appreciate leaders' skills in modelling good practice in the classroom.
- The curriculum provides a good, balanced range of experiences for each pupil. Staff carefully plan what will be taught over the year and include activities which enhance pupils' skills, such as outdoor education and forest schools. The work of therapists adds considerable value to the work of the school. Pupils develop skills to communicate and understand how to manage their behaviours, which can be of a challenging nature.
- The personal, social and health curriculum is well focused on preparing pupils for life when they leave school. Topics are relevant in helping pupils understand how to respond to situations and understand the wider world. The school makes good use of its strong links with the local community to build on pupils' experiences.
- Leaders have ensured that spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and British values are threaded through the curriculum. Effective use is made of visits and visitors to develop pupils' understanding of the wider community. Visitors come from a range of ethnicities as well as from different services such as the police and fire brigade. Trips broaden pupils' experiences and are linked to the curriculum topics, such as a visit to the tank museum and wildlife parks. Pupils develop an understanding of democracy through

the school council and are involved in decision making within the school, such as the appointment of learning support assistants. As a result of these opportunities, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the work of the school and the impact it has had on their children and their family life. One commented that the school has 'changed our lives'. Her comments reflected those of others, who stated that their child was calmer, more disciplined and, as one parent commented, has 'become a better person'. Parents greatly value the weekly reports and the regular calls during the week. They feel well informed about the progress their child is making. The end-of-term reports are detailed and give a clear picture of the progress made and what still needs to be done.

Governance

- The directors know the school well and are committed to meeting the needs of pupils. Leaders benefit from their depth of knowledge and experience. The directors ensure that they have a clear understanding of what goes on in the school. They visit regularly and liaise with leaders through daily phone calls.
- The directors recognise that, as this is a new leadership team, they need to increase their level of challenge and support.
- They have made sure that the resources and environment are of a high quality and are rightly proud, for example, of the new library established to support pupils to learn to read and enjoy books. Finances are monitored closely, and the required information is sent to the relevant local authorities on an annual basis.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are rigorous and effective.
- The checks on the suitability of staff are extremely thorough and monitored very closely by the administration team as well as the headteacher and directors.
- Policies and procedures for keeping pupils safe are detailed and followed by all staff. The high level of training for all staff ensures that they are aware of the appropriate actions and who to go to if they have concerns. New staff have a thorough induction programme, so that they are well versed in all the school's systems. Good-quality risk assessments are in place and reviewed regularly to make sure they remain pertinent.
- The school deals robustly with any safeguarding concerns about pupils and works with a range of agencies to support pupils and their families. The safeguarding leads also work closely with the police, particularly where there are reports of a child witnessing domestic violence. Leaders do not hesitate to escalate matters if they feel agencies are not working quickly enough to safeguard a child.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The close teamwork between teachers, learning support assistants and therapists ensures that teaching and learning across the school are good. A detailed outline of each pupil and what they do well is shared with staff. There is a clear understanding of any triggers

for behaviours. Therapists share their very good knowledge with staff to support strategies and the management of pupils.

- The strong relationships between staff and pupils provide pupils with the confidence to take on the challenges they are given in lessons and to 'try'. As a result, pupils are keen to participate. In a Year 7 English lesson, pupils worked hard to mime different adjectives. They worked together closely to achieve good outcomes.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and is particularly effective in subjects such as history. Their clear understanding of pupils' needs enables them to use a range of strategies that extend pupils' learning. Learning support assistants are often used well to help pupils engage in learning.
- Teachers ensure that lessons are practical and use resources appropriately to support pupils' knowledge and understanding. In mathematics, Year 8 and 9 pupils were learning about Venn diagrams. They laid out examples on the floor and then went outside to divide into groups based on their likes and dislikes of cats and dogs. In a lesson based on Mayan history, pupils made a Mayan chocolate drink. Pupils were keen to talk about what they had learned and clearly enjoy their learning.
- In several subjects, such as mathematics and history, teachers plan effectively to develop pupils' skills over time. In history, for example, pupils have covered a range of topics including the Second World War. Pupils were confident to respond to the teacher's questions about previous work, showing a good knowledge of the topic. A pupil explained what Churchill meant when he said: 'never was so much owed by so many to so few'. Occasionally, planning is less effective. For example, in some classes in English lessons, pupils cover a different skill each week. Teaching does not sufficiently ensure that pupils develop their knowledge, skills and understanding progressively over time.
- Assessment processes are well established and used effectively to check individual pupil progress. Leaders have introduced further systems to enhance assessment. For example, pupils' targets are now presented in a child-friendly way in their books. This is enabling pupils to see how well they are doing. Staff make use of this information to match work to each pupil's abilities. The new self-assessment form enables pupils to assess how well they think they are doing. Where this system is used appropriately, it is clear that teachers and pupils have talked together about their separate gradings. However, these initiatives are still being embedded across the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Many pupils join the school after being out of education for some time and often with a history of disrupted learning. There are clear processes in place that support them very effectively in their transition into school. For example, pupils have a designated member of staff with them who will go into lessons and help them for as long as is needed. Pupils develop very positive attitudes to learning, over time. In lessons, they concentrate well and take pride in their work. Pupils develop confidence and trust in the adults around them.

- Pupils are exceptionally polite and friendly. They introduce themselves and are keen to show off their learning in class. They know that they are listened to by staff and, if they have concerns, who to go to. They commented that they feel safe and this is confirmed by parents.
- The school checks on the social and personal skills of pupils when they join the school. Their social communication skills and ability to express themselves develops very well. This is reflected in the maturity of older pupils, who talk about their plans for the future and what they want to do when they leave.
- Pupils are encouraged to take on responsibilities and to organise themselves, which prepares them for the next stage of life. They make decisions about activities and have ownership of their records of behaviour. The school successfully encourages pupils to develop resilience through trying new experiences and to learn from making mistakes.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe and are aware of the risks around them. They show a strong understanding of online safety and the need to be careful in the use of computers and social media.
- Pupils have access to well-organised impartial careers guidance. The school has developed its careers provision and now has a trained careers leader. A careers programme is in place for Years 7 to 11 and there are very effective links with an independent careers advisor who attends pupils' education and health care plan meetings.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Through a consistent approach by staff, pupils learn to manage their behaviours. This is reflected in the year-on-year reduction in incidents and physical restraints. The school has successfully reduced the number of homophobic and racist incidents. Leaders are now working with pupils to address the small number of verbal incidents directed at female staff.
- Staff expectations are clear and understood by pupils. Their behaviour is tracked through the day and the points they gain are linked to golden time at the end of the week. They understand the process well and appreciate the range of activities they can be involved in. Assemblies and displays around the school are used effectively to celebrate pupils' successes.
- Pupils' attendance is similar to that seen nationally. For many pupils who have not attended school regularly, this is a major success. The school works closely with families to ensure that pupils attend regularly. Absences are carefully checked and tracked.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils join the school with skills and knowledge that are typically well below average for their age. They have often missed periods of education, because of their severe social, emotional and mental health needs and are lacking in confidence. Over time, as a result of a high level of support, pupils including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress in a range of subjects including English and mathematics. The small number of

pupils who receive pupil premium funding benefit from the school's well-planned use of the funds.

- Many pupils are very reluctant to put pen to paper or to read when they start. Pupils benefit from individual and small group sessions to develop their skills. Pupils are encouraged to write and develop their reading skills. This consistency of expectation ensures that pupils develop their literacy skills in a range of subjects. The majority of pupils make at least good progress in their reading. Where pupils need intensive support, the school provides extra tuition after school to enable pupils to make better progress.
- Pupils' communication skills develop well over time. Initially pupils struggle to communicate their thoughts and ideas. Staff are skilled at encouraging pupils to talk about how they feel and the reasons why they act as they do. Over time, pupils develop confidence to contribute to discussions and listen to others. Parents commented that their children were able to express themselves more clearly since joining the school.
- The outcomes for pupils over time are good. By the end of year 11, pupils achieve accreditation in mathematics and English as well as unit awards. In the past three years, all but one pupil has gone on to college or training.
- The progress of all pupils is checked on an individual basis and quick action taken to support any who are at risk of falling behind. However, the school does not systematically analyse the progress of the different groups within the school to establish the impact of its work on pupils' outcomes.

School details

Unique reference number	133392
DfE registration number	878/6202
Inspection number	10056310

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

Type of school	Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	30
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Blackford Education (Schools) Limited
Headteacher	Kirsten Crosby
Annual fees (day pupils)	£66,066 to £78,000
Telephone number	01598740044
Website	libraschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@libraschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	20–22 January 2016

Information about this school

- The Libra School is an independent special school and therapeutic community for pupils with severe social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The school opened in July 2001 and relocated to its current site in 2007. A large proportion of the pupils live in one of the five children's homes located in Devon and Somerset. These homes are owned by the school's proprietors.
- The school is registered for 30 pupils. Young people are referred to the Libra School by local authorities, social services and health departments from around the country. The Libra School works with boys and girls between the ages of five and 18 years old. At the time of the inspection, there were 30 pupils aged between seven and 16.

- There are currently no pupils in the sixth form.
- All pupils have education, health and care plans.
- A third of pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding.
- The school was last inspected in January 2016, when it was judged to be outstanding. At that time, the school met the independent school standards and complied with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.
- The proprietors, who are the company representatives, have responsibility for the governance of the school.
- No pupils attend alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was an aligned inspection with social care. The social care inspector reviewed provision at one of the company's children's homes.
- The inspector observed lessons across the school, with a member of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, staff, therapists and the directors. The inspector had regular discussions with the social care inspector.
- The inspector took into account the responses from 13 questionnaires completed by staff.
- Telephone conversations were held with four parents, and the views of four parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey were considered.
- The inspector spoke with pupils throughout the inspection.
- A wide range of documentation was examined, including the school's policies, its self-evaluation of its performance, records relating to behaviour and safeguarding, and information regarding pupils' achievements and progress.

Inspection team

Sarah Mascall, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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