

Inspection of Blackford Education (Schools) Ltd t/a the Libra School

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

Inspection dates:

1 to 3 February 2022

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous
inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent
school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

The Libra School enables pupils to thrive and succeed. Pupils begin school with less successful experiences in education. Soon, they can see the benefit the school has and how it improves their lives. Pupils are effusive about the staff that support them. One pupil, whose view reflects many, said, 'Staff tailor the support to our needs, helping us learn.' The school dogs also play a vital role in helping pupils to keep calm and develop care and responsibility.

Pupils attend extremely well. Their behaviour is excellent, and they love coming to school. Pupils are safe and say that bullying does not occur. They often join the school with few successful strategies to manage their behaviour. This can result in physical or aggressive outbursts. However, this behaviour does not last long. Pupils develop successful strategies to cope when they find situations tricky. As a result, learning soon takes priority, and pupils excel.

Leaders and staff have the highest expectations of pupils. They have developed an ambitious curriculum for pupils to learn. This helps pupils close gaps in their knowledge and broaden their future opportunities. Pupils feel success and strive to have more of it.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The Libra School provides education for pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Many also have some form of cognitive delay. Pupils have often been less successful in other schools, with many excluded due to behaviour. The Libra School turns the clock back for these pupils, giving them dreams and goals that they did not think were possible. Pupils aspire to attend college and secure jobs that are both achievable and suitably ambitious. This is thanks to the school's challenging curriculum and excellent careers support.

Leaders have ensured the independent school standards are met in full. Their high expectations for pupils are realised in all of the school's work. Staff are highly knowledgeable in supporting pupils' varying needs. All pupils who attend have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). Leaders and staff know pupils' targets and next steps well. They interweave these skilfully into the academic curriculum and therapeutic sessions.

Leaders and staff monitor pupils' progress closely. They use assessment information well. Staff adapt the curriculum precisely for pupils if it is needed. They are quick to notice and act if pupils' progress or engagement reduces. This helps pupils to get back on track without delay.

Pupils study a rich, broad and ambitious curriculum both in school and on the farm. Many arrive with significant gaps in their knowledge, particularly in English and mathematics. Leaders prioritise these subjects above others to ensure pupils have the essential knowledge they need. Leaders' innovative approach to designing the

curriculum helps pupils know and remember important key knowledge. For example, pupils can easily recall the parts of the body associated with the digestive system.

Leaders have put reading at the heart of the curriculum. There is a consistent and highly effective reading programme across the school. Younger pupils receive the precise phonics teaching they need. Therefore, despite having significant gaps in their phonics knowledge when they arrive, pupils catch up quickly. They remember sounds they have learned with increasing accuracy and apply these when reading unfamiliar words. Leaders and staff have invested heavily in an inspirational library. Pupils enjoy reading these books in their own time and during lessons.

Pupils' rates of attendance are very high. They rarely miss a day. Leaders' support for pupils to help them manage their own behaviour is exceptional. Over time, each pupil's challenging behaviour reduces significantly. Pupils use effective strategies to manage their behaviour with increasing success. Pupils can see the positive impact this has on their education and school experience. As a result, the school is calm, and pupils engage extremely well with their learning.

Pupils care for one another. Despite their differences, they know it is important to show tolerance and respect. Pupils use their enrichment time very well to take advantage of rich experiences such as learning sign language or climbing. These opportunities are overwhelmingly popular with pupils, and this is a time of the week they look forward to. Older pupils receive highly effective careers guidance. This helps them make informed choices about their next steps in further education, training or employment. Pupils know the fundamental British values well. Pupils told inspectors that individual liberty means people should do what they want but within the law.

Staff skilfully support pupils' character development. They intertwine opportunities for pupils to overcome things they usually find tricky such as turn-taking or working as part of a team. As a result, pupils become more resilient and comfortable to participate willingly. The school's relationships and sex education and personal, social and health education (PSHE) ensure pupils learn important knowledge about their bodies, relationships and how to lead healthy lives. Pupils feel at ease talking about their stage of development. For example, pupils readily discuss the changes that occur during puberty.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The safeguarding policies and procedures follow the latest statutory guidance and are published on the school's website. Leaders check carefully that adults are suitable to work with children. The proprietor ensures that leaders fulfil their duties and implement the school's policies effectively.

Leaders and staff get the training they need to carry out their roles and responsibilities to safeguard pupils well. They know the risks that pupils face,

particularly when online. Staff are alert to spotting differences in pupils' behaviour, mood or appearance. The strong relationships between adults and pupils ensure that nothing goes unnoticed. Leaders log, track and monitor concerns meticulously. They act on concerns about pupils' welfare appropriately and without delay.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	133392
DfE registration number	878/6202
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10217286
Type of school	Other 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	39
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Blackford Education (Schools) Limited
Chair	Joan Wilkes
Headteacher	Kirsty Crosby
Annual fees (day pupils)	£62,261 to £76,371
Telephone number	01598740044
Website	libraschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@libraschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 to 15 November 2018

Information about this school

- All pupils have SEMH needs. Some pupils also have autism spectrum disorder.
- Pupils spend some time learning at the school's farm, which is located approximately one hour away from the main site.
- All pupils have an EHC plan, funded by a range of local authorities.
- The school is registered for 40 pupils between the ages of five and 18 years old. However, at the time of the inspection, there were no pupils over the age of 16 on the school's roll.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.
- All pupils attend the school full time.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, science, PSHE and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and considered samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector listened to pupils read to a familiar adult.
- The team inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead to consider staff's recruitment procedures, which included scrutinising the school's single central record.
- Inspectors considered pupils' behaviour throughout the inspection, including during lesson visits.
- The lead inspector spoke with a director from the proprietor group.
- The team inspector visited the farm to see how pupils benefit from this part of the school's curriculum.
- The lead inspector considered responses to the Ofsted staff and pupil questionnaires, alongside seven responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. This included six free-text responses from parents and carers.

Inspection team

Nathan Kemp, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sue Costello

Her Majesty's Inspector

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