

The Libra School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	933/6202
Unique Reference Number	133392
Inspection number	330445
Inspection dates	26–27 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Eileen McAndrew

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

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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, 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 Libra School is an independent special day school for girls and boys aged between 8 and 18 years of age who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). All pupils have a history of family disruption, multiple placements, fragmented school experience and challenging behaviours. The school opened on its original site in 1999 and is registered for up to 10 pupils. It is now situated in rural surroundings on the outskirts of South Molton in Devon. At the time of the inspection there were 10 pupils on roll, six of whom have statements of special educational needs. An additional pupil was on a short-term placement for assessment. The school aims to provide 'access to a broad and balanced curriculum and the ideals that support the national Curriculum'. The school was last inspected by Ofsted in 2005.

The headteacher was unavoidably absent during the inspection.

Evaluation of the school

The Libra School achieves its aim and provides a good quality education for its pupils. The school has made significant improvement since its last inspection. The good quality curriculum ensures interesting learning experiences for pupils, complemented by worthwhile activities and visits. Teaching is almost always good and occasionally outstanding, and as a consequence pupils make good progress. They become increasingly effective learners who are able to re-engage with education and experience success. The personal development of pupils is good: effective pastoral care ensures pupils are well cared for and procedures for welfare, health and safety are good. Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils enjoy coming to school and carers are unanimously supportive of the school. The school meets all of the regulatory requirements.

Quality of education

The good quality curriculum provides an interesting range of learning experiences enabling all pupils to make good progress. It includes all the required areas of learning, as well as personal, social and health education (PSHE), religious education (RE) and citizenship. Where appropriate, pupils are entered for a range of national awards and qualifications including GCSE, the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network and AQA unit awards.

The rationale for the development of the curriculum takes close account of the previously disrupted experience of pupils and the reluctance of some to engage with learning. The school's purpose is to meet the needs of each pupil and a personalised curriculum is planned, which effectively meets this aim.

Planning takes account of the programmes of study of the National Curriculum and of the assessed attainment of the individual pupil. Long term planning briefly outlines the topics to be taught in the subject over the year, supported by the national strategies and other national guidance. Medium term planning provides schemes of work for each pupil, outlining in greater detail the coverage across each of the 10 week terms and giving a clear focus for lesson planning. The curriculum is extended through use of specialist therapies and counselling where appropriate.

All pupils have individual education plans which specify long, medium and short term targets closely related to each pupil's identified learning and behavioural difficulties or statement of special educational need. Literacy and numeracy are given specific emphasis with additional literacy provision for some pupils. This represents improved provision since the last inspection.

Vocational courses are a developing strength in the curriculum, with pupils having good quality opportunities for learning in areas such as land sciences and horticulture, where they have taken part with distinction in national competitions. Preparation for the world of work has a high priority and is supported through established links with the Connexions service and through opportunities for work experience.

Residential and day visits out of school are regularly planned to extend and enhance work in the curriculum. Some of these are major ventures, such as when pupils explored the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida or undertook a field studies visit to Iceland; others are good quality enrichment visits planned as an integral part of the curriculum. These activities add significantly to the quality of pupils' learning through direct experience of the wider world.

The quality of teaching is almost always good and occasionally outstanding. The good teaching also has some outstanding features, contributing strongly to the good progress made by pupils. Individual teachers have a good and sometimes very extensive knowledge of the subjects they teach, adding significantly to the overall quality of teaching. Lesson planning is always conscientious and sometimes particularly good. Teachers show an accurate understanding of pupils' strengths and weaknesses and have the skills to support learning effectively. They are competent and assured in working with pupils whose behaviour is often volatile and unpredictable and are adept at creating a calm and secure learning environment.

The development of oral and written skills has been given increased priority since the last inspection. All lessons ensure that pupils have opportunities to respond to questions, recall what they know and discuss the tasks they are tackling. Similarly,

links with numeracy are productively made in some other subjects to ensure that gaps in pupils' basic skills are addressed wherever possible. Some pupils lack fluency in reading and have continuing difficulty reading longer or unfamiliar words. While some opportunities are planned for additional reading practice, there is currently no intensive reading programme for these pupils.

The relationships between pupils and teachers are good, so pupils respond with increasing effort, trying hard at the tasks they are set. The often one-to-one teaching allows teachers to structure lessons skilfully so that each step builds on the last, and to support pupils in completing work. Staff give unfailing encouragement to pupils and are consistent in their approach. They remain non-confrontational and have reliable approaches to manage any sudden untoward behaviour.

Systems for assessment are effectively implemented. On pupils' entry to the school their levels of attainment are assessed over several weeks so that an appropriate personalised curriculum may be planned. Each pupil's work is routinely supported in class and is marked regularly. Most written comments encourage pupils, identify features for praise or tell pupils what they need to do next to improve their work. Progress is assessed and recorded regularly across all areas of pupils' academic and personal development and shared with relevant authorities. In their responses to the questionnaires, pupils said they believe they make good progress. The school carries out a useful range of standardised tests as well as national tests to compare pupils' performance with that of pupils nationally.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good as a result of the school's strongly embedded emphasis on personal development.

The ethos of the school contributes to an environment where trust and mutual respect are steadily fostered. Pupils are helped to settle and feel part of a community. They learn what is expected of them and increase their self-confidence by making good progress and enjoying school. Pupils understand right and wrong and through work in PSHE and citizenship, refine their moral understanding. Behaviour is outstanding and attendance is high.

Highly effective behaviour management supports pupils, helping them towards a growing awareness that their conduct affects others and has direct personal consequences. This development is further supported through the additional social skills programme, an intensive course covering life skills, interpersonal relations, healthy living, job preparation, and beliefs and values. Pupils are introduced to the notion of religious belief through learning about major world faiths, and this helps them to recognise and appreciate differences in cultural heritage and ways of life. Work in citizenship provides opportunities for pupils to learn about life in their own society and the values of differing ethnic communities within Britain. Pupils' increasing competence in basic skills and their opportunities for work experience

contribute to their economic awareness and greater understanding of the world beyond school.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is good and supported by appropriate policies and procedures. Pastoral care is good and staff are sensitive to the differing social and emotional needs of individual pupils. All the requirements for safeguarding children are in place and staff training is undertaken regularly. The policy for visits out of school has been amended to take account of guidance issued by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Fire safety procedures are established and fire-fighting equipment is checked and maintained annually by a specialist company. The school has a current fire risk assessment which will be forwarded to the Fire Officer and to the DCSF for scrutiny. The policy for first aid is supported by a number of fully trained staff.

Pastoral care ensures that pupils feel safe and are confident that they have adults to whom they can go if they have a concern. Pupils are confident that any incidence of bullying would be dealt with swiftly by the staff. The reward systems encourage good behaviour and tangible rewards reinforce the notion that actions have consequences. Staff supervision is consistently good.

Aspects of nutrition, food and healthy living are explored in science, home economics and PSHE. The dangers to health from smoking and the misuse use of drugs are studied so that pupils become increasingly aware of the need to make sensible choices. The gymnasium and outdoor activities help them to appreciate that exercise can be enjoyable as well as healthy.

The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (2002).

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance with the Criminal Records Bureau at an enhanced level. The school's rigorous procedures in relation to employment ensure that all required information is recorded. This data has been used to compile the required single central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The school provides good quality accommodation in its remodelled farm and surrounding buildings. Space is used imaginatively to create well resourced classrooms and interesting communal areas where pupils' work is displayed and celebrated. The small library is a valuable resource but it is not yet fully furnished. The neighbouring building provides a flexible space for a small well-equipped gymnasium, an art room and a music room.

The school's outdoor space is extensive with attractive lawns and planted areas for recreation, as well as a greenhouse and an area to support an increasing focus on horticulture and land science.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides detailed and useful information through its prospectus and its 'Statement of Purpose' document. The latter explains the school's aims, philosophy and intentions in a clear and coherent way. Local authorities that responded through the questionnaires were uniformly supportive of the school's work and believe the school provides very well for any pupil they place there. Detailed annual reports keep them well informed about the pupils' progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's policy and procedures for handling complaints meet the requirements in full.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

What the school could do to improve further

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

- implement the planned arrangements for the further improvement of assessment
- improve support for literacy by considering a specific programme for reading development.
- continue to develop the school library.

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 Libra School		
DCSF number	933/6202		
Unique reference number	133392		
Type of school	Special; day school for pupils with BESD		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1999		
Age range of pupils	8-18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 3	Girls: 7	Total: 10
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 3	Girls: 3	Total: 6
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 3	Girls: 7	Total: 10
Annual fees (day pupils)	£57,000 to £76,000		
Address of school	Edgemoor Court South Radworthy South Molton Devon EX36 3LN		
Telephone number	01598 740044		
Fax number	01598 740076		
Email address	joanwilkes@libraschool.co.uk; kirstycrosby@libraschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs J E Wilkes		
Proprietor	Blackford Education (Schools) Ltd Directors: Mr Alan Wilkes and Mrs Joan E Wilkes		
Reporting inspector	Eileen McAndrew		
Dates of inspection	26–27 November 2008		