

The Linnet Independent Learning Centre

Independent school standard inspection report

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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

The Linnet Independent Learning Centre is a small independent special school in Derbyshire for pupils with statements of special educational needs for their behavioural, emotional, social and/or learning difficulties. It opened in February 2006. The Early Years Department (The Bramblings) offers provision for five pupils aged three to 10 years of age in a separate, purpose-built unit with its own outside play area; it will become a primarily three to eight provision from the autumn term, subject to need. There are currently no pupils within the Early Years Foundation Stage. The Senior Department (The Linnet) offers provision for seven pupils aged eight to 16 years. The school will cease to take girls from the next academic year. Although now registered for up to 14 pupils, this allows the school flexibility to take pupils on induction and before a formal place is offered. Half of the current 12 pupils aged seven to 16 on roll are currently in the care of local authorities. The school offers a blend of therapeutic education and care for pupils who have experienced difficulties within mainstream and often also within other special educational provision. The school motto: 'Well-being, Involvement, Support and Challenge' reflects the school's emphasis on the development of the 'whole student' while promoting independent learning. Each pupil has an individual curriculum and most are taught individually for the majority of the school day. The school was last inspected in July 2009.

Evaluation of the school

The Linnet Independent Learning Centre provides a good quality education. It has a number of outstanding features, including the quality of the curriculum which meets pupils' individual needs particularly well. Teaching and assessment are good and with some outstanding practice evident. Consequently, almost all pupils are making good progress. The welfare, health and safety of pupils are given utmost priority and are also outstanding because of the high level of care and attention afforded to every pupil. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are rigorous and meet regulatory requirements. The school has improved since the last inspection and all of the independent school regulations are met.

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

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

Quality of education

The broad curriculum is outstanding. High quality schemes of work are in place and implemented for all of the required areas of learning. These closely follow the National Curriculum guidance and are adapted very effectively according to whatever level is appropriate for each pupil. The core skills of literacy and numeracy are appropriately prioritised. The school has correctly identified that the curriculum policies do not always make the most of integrating reading, writing and applying mathematics across the whole of the curriculum for younger pupils. Staff ensure that the curriculum meets pupils' specific needs very well, including the objectives specified in their statement of special educational needs. Pupils' needs and interests are also accounted for in the choice of activities, out-of-school activities and visits. Very high quality resources, including those for information and communication technology, support pupils' learning across the curriculum very effectively and are suitably matched to pupils' specific needs. Pupils' personal, social and health education, including citizenship, is developed very well in all curriculum areas. The school makes full use of its location. Pupils regularly make visits to local sports and leisure facilities, and places of significant or historic interest. There are strong curricular links with other schools and colleges. The school actively seeks suitable vocational placements or further education for pupils in their final academic year. The school effectively fulfils its aims, through the curriculum, to encourage pupils to be active learners and to investigate, explore, experiment and research. It also very effectively widens pupils' life skills and experiences, for example by taking all pupils on an annual residential visit.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Provision is not outstanding because not all pupils are making outstanding progress over time; there remain some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, some missed opportunities for learning and assessment documentation is not wholly effective. Teaching and support staff bring a range of relevant experience and training to the school. They are highly skilled in their ability to manage pupils with complex behavioural and emotional needs. They have strong relationships with pupils and as key workers are successful in building their trust. Consequently, pupils' immediate needs are quickly assessed each morning, helping them to get the most out of their day. Unqualified teachers sometimes lack confidence in understanding the National Curriculum levels and how to plan effectively for pupils' next steps in all areas of the curriculum. They sometimes do not have high enough expectations for the pupils' academic work as their focus is foremost on addressing the requirements of each pupil's statement and improving their socialisation and behaviour. However, there is some outstanding teaching practice worthy of sharing more widely across both parts of the school. Staff working with the older pupils integrate subjects very skilfully to ensure that pupils gain from all learning opportunities within each activity. Staff challenge appropriately, with sensitivity to how long pupils will remain focused and engaged. Their concentration spans are increasing and they remain on task for longer periods. A range of assessment materials is used, which allows comparisons with children at other schools and measures pupils' progress towards the targets on their statements. Pupils are not always clear about what they need to do to improve their work as the marking is not always sufficiently detailed, nor does it show clearly enough whether

they have achieved the target that they are personally working towards. However, there are discussions between key workers and pupils about this. The size of the school ensures that staff can meet pupils' needs flexibly, and that they receive individual support to help them succeed. Younger pupils learn to work more in small groups. Some pupils are reticent to read and not all staff sufficiently record pupils' reading progress in detail to reinforce what the next steps are or where the focus of learning needs to be. Pupils can also be reticent to write and the school works hard to find innovative ways for pupils to write for a purpose. The same high expectations for writing, including for presentation and sentence construction, are not always consistently followed through. However, most importantly, because of their interest in workshops and activities, and their strong relationships with staff, pupils are now enjoying their learning and are better engaged than they have been previously. One pupil captured this as he explained: 'I love it here. It's the best school I've been at for a long time.'

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils are learning to make the right choices and to understand the consequences of their behaviour, which is increasingly good and constantly improving. This is as a result of effective policies for behaviour and anti-bullying, which are consistently applied and skilfully managed. Pupils love being at The Linnet or The Bramblings where, one parent believes: 'Staff go that extra mile for all the children. The Learning Centre is led by an extraordinary head, who accepts all learners as who they are.' It is, therefore, no surprise that pupils are beginning to conform better than they have done previously and have a genuine desire to attend regularly.

There are many opportunities for pupils to be reflective when things have gone particularly well or gone wrong. Pupils are also invited to discuss their emotions, which is handled very sensitively. There are frequent discussions and stories about moral issues, helping to develop pupils' understanding of right and wrong. The pupils cooperate extremely well socially as a group and they get along very well, regardless of their backgrounds, previous experiences or current situation at home. They are developing a deeper knowledge of social conventions, which means that they are able to go on more outings to public places and take part in the community. For example, they make use of local amenities in Ashby, Burton and Birmingham, including regular use of the nearby sports centre and taking many theatre trips. Mealtimes are now much more successful social events as disruption has reduced. Staff strongly promote the development of a school community in which individual pupils feel recognised and where they are encouraged to work together and support each other. Pupils are developing a broad general knowledge of public institutions and in a positive way. The school does a great deal to raise pupils' awareness of their own and others' cultures and beliefs.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The whole staff team ensure that pupils are extremely well cared for and are kept safe and secure. They understand the needs of each individual very well indeed. Welfare, health and safety are a priority of the school mainly because of the medical and behavioural needs of the pupils it cares for and educates. Safety arrangements on and off site are rigorous. Pupils are supervised exceptionally well by staff in all areas of the school, including the large garden areas. Staff have up-to-date training and knowledge of safeguarding and child protection. All policies and procedures, including those for child protection, follow current guidance, are understood, and are implemented very effectively. Risk assessments are very comprehensive and essential repairs and maintenance are dealt with most promptly. Any incident is followed up with pupils and with staff to raise awareness of preventing accidents. Pupils' hygiene routines are well-established. All aspects of record keeping are thorough. Admissions and attendance registers are appropriately maintained. The school has an increasingly good track record for attendance, with virtually no unauthorised absences and only a small number of fixed-term exclusions to date. The school has an accessibility plan in place and fully meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has appropriate procedures in place for the recruitment and vetting of staff and others, and guidance is followed systematically. There is a single central record which contains all the necessary checks that have been made on the proprietors, staff and volunteers to confirm their suitability to work with children.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The Centre is situated in a large, modern double-fronted detached house on the outskirts of the south Derbyshire village of Castle Gresley. In 2008, the former double garage was converted to provide two-storey accommodation for the younger pupils on roll. Both parts of the centre have their own safe, separate extensive outdoor gardens, with teaching and learning cabins and challenging static play equipment. Accommodation and facilities are of, and are maintained to, a very high standard and there is adequate space for the number of pupils on roll. There is one teaching room on the first floor of each building. There is suitable provision for those pupils who become ill. All regulations for the premises are met.

Provision of information

The provision of information for parents, carers and others is clear, accurate and up-to-date. It is of very high quality and fully complies with the regulations. Home and school liaison is given strong priority in the school and all key workers work hard to reinforce positive relationships between the pupil and their family, as well as the partnership between the school and the family. Consequently, this aspect of its work

is a strong feature. Parents and carers and other professionals strongly agree that the school makes a significant contribution to children's personal and academic development.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints policy is clear and meets regulatory requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets 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.

- Make sure that all teaching is as the best in the school by:
 - developing consistency, particularly in the lower part of the school
 - continuing to support unqualified teachers
 - ensuring both units work closely and cohesively together and continually share working practice.
- Ensure that all lessons are considered for their learning potential and that all key-workers have sufficiently high expectations for developing pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills across all areas of the curriculum.
- Reduce the volume of documentation to ensure manageability and that there are effective, streamlined methods for recording pupils' progress accurately by:
 - including more detail in the marking of pupils' work
 - making better use of reading diaries
 - supporting staff confidence in the use of National Curriculum levels.

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		
Type of school	Special		
Date school opened	23 February 2006		
Age range of pupils	3–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 11	Girls: 1	Total: 12
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 11	Girls: 1	Total: 12
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 6	Girls: 0	Total: 6
Annual fees (day pupils)	£59,000–£72,450		
Address of school	107 Mount Pleasant Road, Castle Gresley, DE11 9JE		
Telephone number	01283 213989		
Email address	Linnet1@btconnect.com		
Headteacher	Jan Sullivan		
Proprietor	Lewis Charlton Ltd		

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.



21 June 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Linnet Independent Learning Centre, Castle Gresley, DE11 9JE

Firstly, thank you for being so helpful to me during my visit. I really enjoyed my time with you, particularly sharing mealtimes with you and taking part with the older pupils in your news time. I was very pleased to hear about how much happier you are becoming. You told me that you can see improvements in your own behaviour and attitudes, and that you get on well with your key workers. It is really great that you get in your taxis every day to come to school and that you all want to be here. I was pleased to hear how much you particularly like the physical education sessions and some of you are obviously really keen artists. However, I am also reassured that, in very small steps, you are now making better progress also in your reading, writing and maths. These skills are very important indeed in helping you to be successful in the future, for example in gaining qualifications and jobs which you will enjoy. I was thrilled to hear of the success of one of the older students who is now going to be working as a mechanic at a garage. How fantastic!

The Linnet is a good school and the range of activities you do is outstanding. All of the adults really care about every one of you and make sure you are kept very safe. The school meets all of the regulations that I had to check. It is keen to keep getting better and so I have asked the headteacher and the rest of the staff to do these things.

- Make sure that all of the teaching is as good as the best in the school and that all of you get an equally good deal.
- Ensure that you learn as much as you can from all of the activities and get as much chance as you can to practise your writing, reading and maths in every subject.
- Review your progress records, including the reading diaries, to ensure they can be easily understood by all who use them, and make sure you know when you receive a gold star or your work is marked, that you know what you have achieved and what you need to do next.

I hope you continue to attend well, make the right choices about your behaviour, and enjoy your learning, including when you research and investigate on your own.
Yours sincerely

Jane Melbourne
Her Majesty's Inspector

