

Inspection of Learning Opportunities Centre, Secondary

Ringwould Road, Ringwould, Deal, Kent CT14 8DW

Inspection dates: 18 to 20 October 2022

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Learning Opportunities Centre, Secondary is for pupils who have had difficult experiences of school in the past. Some might not otherwise have a school place; others have refused to attend their previous school. Together, staff and leaders have created a school that their pupils actively want to attend.

From the moment that a pupil joins the school, staff work to get to know each one as an individual. Collectively, adults and pupils build positive relationships based on trust and respect. Pupils learn to see themselves as valued members of the school community.

Pupils learn in small classes, and sometimes in one-to-one teaching sessions. Classrooms have a calm and purposeful feel. When pupils need extra support, or are struggling, exactly the right help is quietly provided. Sometimes, this might be some additional emotional support from Peanut, the school dog. At other times, pupils need a high level of specialist support from staff.

Over time, all pupils participate in school council, as well as a very broad range of wider opportunities, including horse riding and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The education that pupils receive at Learning Opportunities Centre, Secondary has, at every level, been designed to give them the very best chance of future success.

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

The school was initially set up to provide an enriching education for children who were looked after and who did not have a school place. While the school now serves a broad range of pupils with additional needs, including social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, the underlying moral purpose of senior leaders has remained consistent.

Led by the headteacher, work to support pupils with their behaviour and attitudes is exceptional. Almost all pupils at the school have struggled to regulate their behaviour, either now or in the past. They often join having reached a 'crisis point' in their previous school. Staff are trained to quickly become expert in recognising the small signs that something is starting to go wrong for a pupil. This enables staff to intervene at the earliest possible stage and provide careful and effective support.

Over time, pupils are taught and supported to understand and manage their own feelings and behaviours. Pupils who have been at the school for longer are able to describe how their self-regulation has improved, and the impact that this has had on their lives. The strength of the school's approach to behaviour has enabled senior leaders to move away from a system of rewards and consequences to a system underpinned by relationships, trust and personal responsibility.

Alongside developing a sense of ownership and responsibility in relation to their own behaviour, the school's personal development programme has been designed to give pupils their sense of agency back in a range of ways. Pupils are encouraged to be active participants in school life, as well as in their own lives. For example, pupils are encouraged and supported to participate in any reviews of their education, health and care (EHC) plans, their progress and the provision that is made for them.

Through the school's outdoor learning programme, pupils learn to develop their resilience. They are then supported to transfer this resilience into the classroom setting. Pupils could be seen working through increasingly challenging learning, overcoming barriers to learning that would previously have stood in their way. Leaders have introduced a highly effective personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum for pupils that includes relationships and sex education. Pupils learn about a wide range of cultures. They are confident to discuss the protected characteristics. Pupils feel it is safe to be themselves at Learning Opportunities Centre, Secondary. They know they will be respected.

Leaders are determined that pupils will study a broad and balanced academic curriculum that enables them to engage with the wider world. At the time of the last inspection, the curriculum for mathematics was well designed and taught, but the curriculum in many other areas, including English, was not well sequenced. In addition, reading did not have a high enough profile in the school and too many pupils had negative views of reading. Senior leaders recognise that at that time, the academic ambition for pupils was not consistently high enough. There is now a common understanding, shared by all staff, that an enriching and therapeutic provision can go hand in hand with a high-quality academic curriculum.

Senior leaders have carried out a full review of the curriculum in all subjects. Their work to redesign the curriculum in several subjects is well underway. However, leaders are aware that this work is more developed in some subjects.

Leaders are acutely aware that pupils arrive at the school with varied starting points, undiagnosed learning difficulties, and sometimes significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding because of missed schooling. This picture has been further complicated by the pandemic. Pupils often need time to settle in the school before they can be properly assessed. Leaders are carefully taking account of this in their approach to curriculum design by clearly setting out the key knowledge and concepts that pupils need to retain over time, and ensuring that pupils regularly re-encounter these core aspects of the curriculum as they progress through the curriculum in each subject.

As the curriculum has developed, leaders have been proactive in their approach to monitoring and developing the quality of teaching in the school. Leaders recognise that as they refine and fully embed the new curriculum, they also need to further develop their assessment approach so that it enables them to identify the gaps that pupils have in their learning, and how well they are learning the school's intended curriculum.

Reading now has a higher profile within the school. The school library has been redesigned, and pupils and staff have worked with a local independent book shop to stock the library with engaging books. Every pupil in the school has weekly one-to-one reading sessions with an adult. There is, however, more work to do to ensure that pupils at an earlier stage of reading get exactly the right support.

The headteacher and his senior leadership team are dedicated to ensuring that every pupil gets the help they need to access education and to develop a sense of belonging and purpose within the school and also within society more widely. The proprietor has an in-depth knowledge of the school, its pupils and their families. She provides effective governance, and together with the senior leadership team, ensures that the independent school standards are consistently met.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Senior leaders ensure that they follow safer recruitment procedures and make the right checks in relation to all staff. Allegations about adults are managed appropriately, and in consultation with the local authority designated officer. There is a clear culture of safeguarding within the school. Leaders and staff know each individual extremely well. This enables them to quickly pick up if something is wrong. Pupils have high levels of trust in staff, and say that because they are not preoccupied with 'getting into trouble', they can go to staff with any worries, including when something has gone wrong online.

Safeguarding records are clear and detailed. Leaders refer to external agencies in a timely way. Senior leaders are particularly knowledgeable about the needs of children who are looked after. Leaders are very clear about what they believe all pupils need in order to be safe and to be well supported, and they are quick to advocate and challenge on their behalf.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Since the last inspection, senior leaders have focused on setting out clear and well-sequenced curriculums, and on how well teachers teach. They have not yet focused with sufficient precision on whether this work has had the intended impact on pupils' learning. They need to ensure that they establish systems to carefully measure the impact of their curriculum development work, and to ensure that pupils are achieving the best possible outcomes.
- The curriculum is at an earlier stage of development in a small number of subjects. In these subjects, it is not clear precisely what pupils will learn and in what order. This makes it harder for teachers to focus their teaching, and harder for leaders to assess how well pupils are learning the intended the curriculum. Leaders need to continue their work to develop the curriculum in these subjects, ensuring that teachers know precisely what they are teaching and when to teach

it. Leaders need to ensure that their approach to assessment is adapted in line with the new curriculum so that they can accurately measure what pupils have learned of the school's intended curriculum.

- While reading now has a raised profile within the school and pupils do read regularly with staff, there is not a clear approach to ensuring that pupils who are not able to decode well learn to do so with accuracy. Leaders need to ensure that there are systems in place to identify when a pupil has gaps in their knowledge of the alphabetic code, that these pupils are supported by staff with the necessary expertise and that they have sufficient opportunity to practise reading books that align with the letters and sounds they have learned.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	119013
DfE registration number	886/6063
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10243453
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	10 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	29
Proprietor	Lesley Buss
Headteacher	Simon Graydon
Annual fees (day pupils)	£30,688 to £53,248
Telephone number	01304 381 906
Website	www.learningopps.org
Email address	simong@learningopps.org
Dates of previous inspection	11 to 13 February 2020

Information about this school

- Learning Opportunities Centre, Secondary is an independent school. It is registered for pupils from the of age 10 to 19 years, but predominantly serves pupils aged 11 to 16.
- The school provides for pupils with a wide range of additional needs, including SEMH needs, autism spectrum disorder and moderate learning difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- All pupils have had negative past experiences of education. Many have been excluded or have experienced significant disruption to their education.
- The school uses three unregistered alternative providers.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with a range of senior staff, including the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. The lead inspector met with representatives of the proprietor.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the quality of education provided in other subjects.
- Inspectors carried out other activities to check that the school meets the independent school standards. These included a check of the school premises and wider work to comply with health and safety laws (including fire safety). Inspectors considered the school's approach to risk management. Inspectors also checked the relevant policies and the school website.
- Inspectors judged the effectiveness of safeguarding by meeting with leaders, discussing records of concerns and subsequent actions, and speaking with pupils and staff about this aspect of the school's work. Inspectors confirmed that the right checks are being made to ensure that all staff, supply staff, and members of the proprietor body are suitable for the posts they occupy. Inspectors confirmed that any allegations about adults are managed and reported appropriately.

- Inspectors considered responses to the staff and pupil surveys as well as responses to Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Hilary Macdonald

His Majesty's Inspector

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