

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

INSPECTION REPORT

INSPECTION CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO SECTION 162A
OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2002

Name of school:	Larchcroft
DfE number: FOCUS number:	935/6082 412
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Mr Ted Cohn Supporting Inspectors: Mr Simon Bennett Mr Tony Hubbard Lay Inspector: Mr Douglas Siderfin
Dates of inspection:	3 to 6 October 2011

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Larchcroft School

Address of school: 32 Larchcroft Road
Ipswich
IP1 6AR

Telephone number: 01473 464975

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Email address: admin@focuslearningorg.com

Proprietor: Larchcroft Education Trust

Name of Chief Executive Officer: Mr Alan Webber

Name of Senior Teacher: Mr Simon Studd

DfE number: 935/6082

FOCUS number: 412

Type of school: Independent school affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

Age range of pupils and students: 11 to18

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 37 Girls: 22

Number of post-16 students: Boys: 12 Girls: 6

Number of pupils with statements of special educational need: Boys: 0 Girls: 0

Annual fees: No fees charged

Type of inspection: Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Inspection Team:

Reporting Inspector: Mr Ted Cohn

Supporting Inspectors: Mr Simon Bennett
Mr Tony Hubbard

Lay Inspector: Mr Douglas Siderfin

Dates of inspection: 3 to 6 October 2011

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection:

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service in accordance with Section 162(A)(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, and it follows the inspection framework laid down by the Service and the Focus Learning Trust (FLT) and agreed with the Department for Education (DfE). It was conducted by independent professional inspectors who looked at all aspects of the school's provision as required by the current regulations. The professional inspectors were accompanied by a trained lay inspector who looked at agreed aspects of the school's management and ethos and reported on these to the FLT. His findings are summarised in Section C of this document, but this section is not a statutory part of the inspection process.

Information about the school:

Larchcroft School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils aged from eleven to eighteen from families of the Brethren community and is maintained by the Larchcroft Education Trust. It was registered in August 2005 as a school of special religious character, having a Christian ethos based on scriptural values and Christian beliefs. The school is affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust (FLT). It is situated in the centre of Ipswich and is non-selective.

Summary of main findings:

Larchcroft School provides a good education, with some outstanding features, for its pupils, which meet its aims well and all the regulatory requirements. It has addressed the various shortcomings identified at the time of the last inspection and has improved its provision, notably with regard to its sixth-form curriculum provision, the quality of teaching and assessment, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the welfare, health and safety of pupils. Curriculum planning has improved, but some inconsistencies remain.

What the school does well:

- it has created a cohesive and purposeful teaching and learning community, which celebrates achievement and supports learning very well;
- it provides a curriculum that meets the needs of pupils well across the whole age range;
- its teaching is good, with some outstanding features, leading to pupils making consistently good progress and achievement;
- its pupils are very well cared for, with close attention to health and safety, and their behaviour is exemplary;
- it has strong links with parents; and
- it is well led.

The school meets all regulatory requirements

Next Steps

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

- further improve the medium and long-term planning of teaching and learning;
and
- establish clear procedures for the regular review and up-dating of school documentation, including clear timeframes for review and the clearer identification of specific responsibilities for new appointments.

SECTION B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

PART 1 - The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school's educational provision is good, with a number of interesting and excellent features. The curriculum is closely matched to the school's aims and ethos and to the wishes of parents. It is highly inclusive and flexibly organised to cater for individuals, especially in the sixth form. Pupils confirmed their approval of the education they receive and, in their discussions with inspectors, expressed their appreciation of their experience. The school has addressed both the recommendations made at the last inspection, although medium and long-term curriculum planning, despite improving, remains uneven in quality.

Pupils of all ages study Bible Studies, personal, health and social education (PHSE), music and physical education (PE) and are prepared for their future working lives by engaging in business-related courses during their time in the school. In Years 7 to 9 courses include the subjects of the national curriculum and office skills. In Years 10 and 11 the school retains this core provision, to which it adds business studies.

The provision in Years 12 to 13 has improved significantly since the last inspection and meets the needs of the pupils well. Pupils in the sixth form continue to share the common core curriculum, which supports their balanced spiritual, moral, academic, commercial, aesthetic/practical and physical development. At the same time, the provision is highly flexible, so that, for example, it can include a day a week on work experience, an Advanced Subsidiary (AS) course in mathematics for one pupil or an accounts course through a distance learning link with another school. Here, and in Years 10 and 11, the school has been resourceful in addressing the needs of individual pupils, so maximising opportunities for them to do well. Pupils receive good quality careers education and guidance, including work experience that enhances their knowledge of the world of work.

Pupils' educational experience is enriched by a variety of extra-curricular activities, including music, which is a particularly strong feature, as at the last inspection. Pupils benefit from a wide range of education visits and from links with other Fellowship schools both within the United Kingdom and across the world. In these ways, and through the curriculum as a whole, pupils are very well prepared for the world of work.

The planning of the curriculum is satisfactory and improving. Where necessary, Fellowship guidelines, supported by medium term plans, are adapted to accommodate developments in public syllabuses. This process works well in practice, but documentation to support planning is of an inconsistent quality. The school is making good progress in establishing cross-curricular links and the school's whole-curriculum days have excited both staff and pupils by creatively linking subjects to current events, such as the Japanese earthquake in the recent survival project.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

The quality of teaching and assessment

The teaching is good overall and in nearly a third of lessons seen, across a wide range of subjects, it was judged to be excellent. At the core of the good teaching is the development of pupils' understanding, interest, and involvement, and their ability to think for themselves. With this, goes a strong emphasis on numeracy, literacy and oral expression.

Teachers know their pupils very well. This is strikingly illustrated by the deep knowledge and understanding that recently appointed teachers demonstrated of the needs and potential of the pupils they teach. Subject knowledge is strong, and teachers use resources to good effect, although electronic resources are not always available to enhance teaching and learning when teachers wish to use them, and in one instance, for example, led to unnecessary copying from the board.

Teachers and pupils get on well together and work in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust, encouraging good behaviour, positive dialogue and ready participation. Lessons are well planned and varied in content. In a Year 13 English lesson, for instance, the teacher drew pupils into debate and gave them the space to develop their ideas, expand their vocabulary and analyse the use of language in an interview with great perception, leading to work of a high quality. In two science lessons in Year 7, taught by two different teachers, approaches to learning were of high quality and reflected a well-planned sequence of activities, following on from a homework in which pupils had used information books to identify and produce models of different types of cell. Excitement had stimulated deep research, leading to the learning and use of advanced scientific vocabulary. Shrewd and lively discussion subsequently combined subject knowledge with humour and excellent use of resources.

Questioning is often of a high quality, leading to dialogue that develops, tests and consolidates learning in a most effective manner. Relationships between teachers and pupils and amongst pupils are always good and often excellent, demonstrating high levels of mutual respect and trust, creating an environment highly conducive to learning. Pupils feel confident in their capacity to make progress and teachers identify specific learning needs well. The school provides effectively for its wide range of ability. A good system of screening and identification provides teachers with helpful and regularly reviewed individual education plans, of which they make effective use. Similarly, arrangements to identify and support more able pupils are effective, and several examples were seen of such pupils being given suitably challenging work in a variety of subjects. Teaching thus enables all pupils to make clear and identifiable progress in their learning.

The teachers gain a very good knowledge of their pupils' progress and achievement, through their observation in lessons, their marking and through the school's systematic assessment processes, carried out in line with FLT requirements. Targets for progress are now set and tracked by teachers and managers in all subjects, and provision adapted as necessary. In an increasing number of subjects, pupils are gaining an increased sense of responsibility for their own learning from direct involvement in setting and reviewing their own targets. Marking is regular and supportive, but the spelling of key subject vocabulary is not consistently corrected and target-setting to support pupils' progress is not yet a regular feature.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART 2 - The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) awareness is excellent. The partnership between parents and the school community, and the commitment of trustees and teaching staff, ensure that Christian principles are embedded in the ethos and life of the school. Self-respect and respect for others are integral to the behaviour and actions of the pupils. The pupils have a clear awareness of right and wrong. Behaviour around the school and in class is thoughtful, measured and respectful. The pupils appreciate the environment in which they learn.

Cultural development is strengthened through the curriculum, through cross-curricular strands, through displays, discussion in class, visits by politicians, and visits to places of local interest and further afield. The pupils have an appreciation of the wider world and the understanding of its significance in the context of business. The dominant qualities of the school's life are centred on a sense of partnership and responsibility. Music plays a substantial part in developing pupils' ability to work and perform harmoniously together to a high standard and experience the joy of making music.

Pupils are active in supporting charities, and the school's recent contribution to Cancer Research was much appreciated. Responsibility is taken and exercised willingly by pupils throughout the school. Senior pupils serve as friends, guides and mentors, both to each other and to younger pupils. This is much appreciated and endorsed by those whom they support. All pupils enjoy the chance at one time or another to contribute to the school council and thereby experience democracy in action. Staff set an excellent example in the balance they achieve between friendliness and formality.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART 3 - The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school's provision for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils is excellent and has improved since the last inspection. The FLT documents provide helpful and comprehensive guidance with regard to welfare, health and safety, which the school implements rigorously and empathetically.

Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and people speak warmly of the guidance and support they receive. Pupils identify readily staff that they can go to with a problem and younger pupils also refer to older pupils as sources of comfort, guidance and support, when necessary, reflecting the strong sense of community in the school. Pupils feel very safe and happy at school and their behaviour is exemplary.

Policies to safeguard pupils and promote their welfare are comprehensive and implemented very effectively. The designated safeguarding person (DSP) has had the appropriate level of child protection training and knows the pupils very well. Staff have regular up-dating of their training in safeguarding and child protection, whilst induction procedures for new staff and volunteers include safeguarding and child

protection training. The school has well-designed policies to promote good behaviour and deal with any poor behaviour, including appropriate sanctions. Since the last inspection there have been no instances of misbehaviour serious enough to warrant being recorded in the sanctions book.

The school's anti-bullying policy provides very effective guidance about recognising bullying in all its forms, ways of discouraging it and dealing with it if it occurs. The policy is implemented well and the issue of bullying is addressed directly in assemblies and the PSHE programme. Each classroom has a pupil-designed poster that discourages bullying strongly and encourages the reporting of any instances of it. Pupils report that bullying is non-existent and teachers are very alert to any indication that pupils might be troubled, as witnessed during the inspection.

The school has a good level of fire safety; fire safety equipment is in place and its arrangements were found to be fully appropriate in a recent inspection by the local fire service. Fire drills take place on a termly basis and the records kept indicate speedy and efficient evacuation, with effective procedures for checking that all pupils, teachers, volunteers and visitors are fully accounted for. The school First Aid policy is comprehensive and the school has three staff with up-to-date first aid qualifications.

Detailed risk assessments have been carried out for all activities involving an element of risk in the school, with very sound advice about procedures to be followed. Preparations for visits include similarly rigorous risk assessments and guidance on procedures, and this aspect of health and safety has improved significantly since the time of last inspection.

The school has a health and safety manager with professional qualifications in health and safety who visits the school very regularly to monitor health and safety. He works closely with the trustee with responsibility for health and safety and the senior teacher, who is the health and safety officer. Teachers are encouraged to report any maintenance or other issues related to health and safety in the health and safety concerns booklet and these, like those related to regular monitoring, are reviewed speedily and dealt with promptly. The school site has good perimeter fencing, which helps to ensure that the site is safe for children.

The adoption of healthy lifestyles is strongly encouraged by the school, through topics such as the importance of healthy eating and regular aerobic exercise in science, home economics, PE, PSHE and assemblies. The wide range of sporting activities in which pupils engage provides good opportunities to find one they particularly enjoy. As part of the healthy eating policy the contents of lunchboxes are monitored and parents are strongly encouraged to ensure that what is provided reflects healthy eating. Alcohol, drugs and sex education are all addressed in the PSHE programme and parents are encouraged to participate in a range of areas through suggested activities in the PSHE booklet, which they are given a copy of. Cycling proficiency tests for younger pupils and hazard awareness and driving safety courses for sixth-form Pupils are examples of ways in which the school encourages pupils to develop responsible and safe practices in all aspects of their lives.

Admission and attendance registers are properly maintained and the school is very prompt in pursuing any unexplained absence of pupils. Electronic attendance registers are backed up to offsite storage daily. The school fulfils its responsibilities in relation to the discrimination and equality legislation.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART 4 - Suitability of the staff, supply staff and proprietors

All the necessary checks have been carried out with regard to staff, trustees and volunteers to ensure that they are suitable to work with children, including all the necessary enhanced CRB checks. These have been properly recorded in the central register of appointments and the school ensures that it has the relevant supporting documentary evidence.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART 5 - Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The standard and maintenance of the premises and accommodation are excellent. The trustees and senior management of the school have worked hard with great success to harness the potential of a long rectangular site. Space is used to good effect throughout; the site is well laid out and landscaped to allow space for pupils to play, whilst facilitating safe and well-organised access for people and vehicles alike. The site and the facilities are spotlessly maintained. The site is secure, and the classroom spaces are practical, well used and offer flexibility for differing sizes of class. The school has a good library area and art room, although the use of one occasionally constrains the use of the other because of limited sound-proofing. Specialist rooms are all kept in excellent condition and chemicals are securely stored. Facilities for pupils who are ill or injured are wholly satisfactory. Good working relationships have been established with the local fire service. Good quality displays are informative, celebrate pupils' work and enhance the learning environment, making a positive contribution to the development of the pupils' sense of responsibility and self-respect.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 6 - The quality of information for parents

The quality of information for parents is excellent. The school handbook is a source of helpful information to parents and prospective parents. Fortnightly newsletters keep parents well informed about school activities and achievement. Parents are very well informed about their children's progress through termly reports, which provide generally informative comments about achievement and progress, as well as helpful general targets to guide and support further improvement in work. The school is introducing a stronger emphasis on subject-focused targets for pupils in improving its assessment practice, and these are helping to identify specific learning targets for individual subjects in reports. Parents are asked to monitor pupils' planners and, where a pupil has made a note-worthy achievement, an achievement card is sent home informing parents, which parents and pupils much appreciate. Teachers, the senior teacher and the CEO are always willing to meet parents to discuss any concerns they have and will initiate meetings themselves if they have any concerns.

Responses in parental questionnaires, administered at the time of the inspection, indicate high levels of satisfaction about the way in which the school cares for their children and educates them.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART 7 - The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

The school has clear and detailed procedures for dealing with complaints that are easily available for parents. However, the procedures have not been invoked since the last inspection because there have been no complaints.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

SECTION C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT, AND MAINTENANCE OF THE ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL

This section is not a requirement of the Education Act 2002. The business organisation and management of the school were inspected by the Lay Inspector, who has written this section of the report.

The quality of the organisation and management of the school

The school is governed by a board of nine trustees. It has been in its current premises for about seven years. The site is a difficult, long narrow rectangular plot between a railway line and housing, which has been organised very efficiently to make the very best possible use of the space available. The buildings are in excellent condition and decorative state, reflecting the high levels of maintenance insisted on by the trustees and the great care and respect for the school that pupils and staff display. The specialist rooms, like the rest of the school, are in excellent condition and the accommodation supports teaching and learning well.

The dedicated CEO works very closely with the equally dedicated senior teacher in managing the school very effectively. The CEO will shortly be joined by another two trustees who will together operate as a triumvirate, sharing the wide-ranging responsibilities of the position of CEO. This term a deputy head has been appointed to assist in the management of the school and his roles and responsibilities are being developed. The number of trustees' meetings is being increased from bi-monthly meetings to monthly meetings and minutes will include action points, a timescale for the completion of the action point and a clear indication of whose responsibility it is to monitor closely progress in achieving the action point. Trustees currently have particular roles and responsibilities, which they carry out well. Arrangements now being introduced will help to ensure that trustees are better informed about all aspects of the school, and so will strengthen their collective responsibility for the support and oversight of the school. Currently, health and safety and building maintenance sub-committees report back regularly at trustee meetings.

The atmosphere in the school is busy and purposeful, but also happy and relaxed. Communication within the school is good and is satisfactory at other levels. Pupils display great enthusiasm for their school and are articulate and respectful with adults. Staff enjoy working at the school, but sometimes the efficiency of teaching and learning is reduced because of the lack of technological support such as interactive whiteboards.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

Yes

The board of trustees might like to consider the following suggestion as to where specific improvement could be made:

- improve the administration and management of the school by exercising closer oversight, including more directive guidance on occasion.

This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust. Further copies of the report are available from the Operations Manager of the Focus Learning Trust, Siskin House, Siskin Drive, Coventry, or from the School Inspection Service website: www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk