

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
DCSF number: FOCUS number:	935/6082 412
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Eileen McAndrew Supporting Inspectors: Meg Buckingham Peter Jones Lay Inspector: Mike Thomas
Dates of inspection:	06 - 09 October 2008

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Larchcroft	
Address of the school:	32 Larchcroft Road Ipswich IP1 6AR	
Telephone number:	01473 464975	
Fax number:	01473 466063	
Proprietor:	Larchcroft Education Trust	
Name of Chief Executive Officer:	Mr. Alan Webber	
Name of Senior Teacher:	Mr. Simon Studd	
DCSF number:	935/6082	
FOCUS number:	412	
Type of school:	Independent school affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust	
Age range of pupils and students:	11 - 18	
Gender of pupils:	Male and female	
Total number on roll: (Full time)	Boys: 32	Girls: 24
Number of post-16 students:	Boys: 9	Girls: 7
Number of pupils with statements of special educational need:		
	Boys: 0	Girls: 0
Annual fees:	No fees charged	
Type of inspection:	Section 162(A) of the Education Act 2002	
Inspection Team:	Reporting Inspector: E. McAndrew Supporting Inspectors: M Buckingham P. Jones	
	Lay Inspector:	M. Thomas
Dates of inspection:	06 - 09 October 2008	

PART 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 and agreed with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). 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 Focus Learning Trust; 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 11-18 from families who are members of The Brethren community. The school 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. Admission is non-selective. No pupil has a statement of special educational need. At the time of the inspection there were 56 pupils on roll.

This is the school's first inspection under section 162(A).

Summary of main findings:

Larchcroft School has successfully established its identity and ethos and made progress since its monitoring inspection. Its School Improvement Plan shows a clear understanding of priorities still to be addressed. The curriculum provides a satisfactorily broad learning experience for pupils. Teaching is predominantly good and as a consequence pupils of all abilities make good progress. They become effective learners who are highly motivated and come to school willing to work hard. The personal development of pupils is good. Policies to ensure welfare, health and safety are in place and pastoral care and welfare are good. Pupils enjoy being in the school and parents are overwhelmingly supportive, appreciative of the education their children receive and believe they make good progress.

The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

What the school does well:

- it provides a supportive Christian ethos in which pupils' personal development is assiduously and successfully fostered;
- its predominantly good quality teaching ensures that pupils of all abilities make good progress;

- it succeeds in motivating pupils so that they become increasingly active learners who enjoy school and take satisfaction from their achievement; and
- it creates a strong sense of community, engendering a clear responsibility towards one another and the wider community.

What the school must do to improve:

- it should adopt a more consistent approach to developing subject-specific schemes of work;
- it should design and implement sixth form courses relevant and appropriate to pupils' future needs;
- it should build on existing good practice to develop a wider range of classroom approaches so that all pupils have opportunities to learn in different ways; and
- it should further refine planning in all subjects to meet the different levels of ability in each class.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is of satisfactory quality. The curriculum for 11 to 16 year old pupils provides sufficient breadth and balance. It includes the National Curriculum (NC) subjects, office skills and Bible studies. Suitable courses in personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship have been introduced. At Key Stage 4 pupils take an appropriate range of general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses in core and foundation subjects, with options to take either art or business studies, and design technology in either resistant materials or in food and nutrition.

The sixth form provides a range of academic and practical courses broadly focused on preparing pupils for adult life, but their scope for choice of courses linked to their interests and aptitudes, is limited. In addition, the curriculum is not as challenging and motivating as it could be for the age group. At Year 12 the courses include City and Guilds, Advanced Subsidiary (AS) level and FLT certificated courses. Since last year the school has put in place a suite of courses for Year 13 which partially meets pupils' needs and aspirations. This is so, for example in the area of business skills but is not the case with all courses. The Focus graphic communications course taken by some students does not equip them with up-to-date skills and knowledge, and is not appropriate provision. The course does not, for example, make use of current building regulations about insulation, nor does it include the development of skills in computer-aided design which is now common practice in industry. The school is aware that decisions about sixth form courses and their relevance to pupils' future needs must be made with some urgency to ensure that staffing and resources are in place.

Not enough has yet been done to meet the recommendation from the last inspection that schemes of work should '*reflect the school's aims and ethos and help to ensure continuity of learning for all pupils*'. The school makes use of the comprehensive schemes of work published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) but these are not always sufficiently tailored to meet the needs of pupils. The school uses the FLT subject-specific curriculum documents to guide their planning; but these are too variable in quality to provide consistent guidance across the full range of subjects to support the preparation of good schemes of work. This variability, together with uncertainty in the school about scope and purpose, results in schemes of work which are of uneven quality. Strengths in teaching ensure that best use is made of the schemes of work as they are. Nonetheless, the school recognises the need to develop a more consistent approach and is beginning to make some progress in mapping the curriculum and improving its planning.

Provision for music is a strength of the curriculum with a majority of pupils studying a musical instrument, playing in the orchestra and performing in concerts. The school makes good use of its location for regular visits out of school to sites which provide enrichment for curricular topics. These activities add substantially to the quality of pupils' learning through direct experience of the wider world.

None of the pupils has a statement of special educational need. Where pupils need support to maintain their progress, the school makes good provision, for example, in

mathematics where conscientious support is given to less able or less confident pupils.

The quality of teaching and assessment

Teaching is predominantly good and occasionally very good, with some consistently strong features resulting in pupils of all abilities making good progress. Individual teachers have a secure and sometimes very good knowledge of the subjects they teach and this contributes significantly to the overall quality of teaching. Classroom organisation and management are invariably good, resulting in a brisk pace for lessons and a productive use of time. Lesson planning identifies the learning objectives so pupils are clear about what they are expected to know and be able to do. In the most effective lessons, good quality questions engage pupils' interest and help them to make productive connections with previous learning. Some teachers are highly skilled in targeting simple and more complex questions to assess precisely how well pupils of differing abilities are progressing. They are adept at using this information to ensure all pupils are working at an appropriately challenging level.

The very good relationships between staff and pupils build trust and confidence, encouraging pupils and enabling them to believe in their own capacity to learn. Humour is used to good effect, reinforcing enjoyable aspects of learning. The number of pupils in each class is small, so teachers and learning support staff are able to give individuals direct and timely support.

Where pupils had opportunities to work in groups they responded with involvement and enthusiasm. They contributed to each others' learning, by improving their capacity to marshal their thoughts, explain their thinking to others and collectively reach conclusions. Pupils are lively and enthusiastic learners, able to concentrate, persevere and take satisfaction from their achievement.

Literacy and numeracy are given appropriate emphasis. Pupils make good progress in written English and when given the opportunity can contribute orally with increasing confidence. Nevertheless, pupils' ability to use more complex constructions and a wider maturing vocabulary in spoken language is less evident and would benefit from further development. Numeracy skills are effectively developed and pupils are able to apply these to support learning in other subjects, such as science and geography.

Where teaching is less effective, lesson planning takes too little account of the range of pupils' abilities so the tasks set fail to challenge the most able and are too difficult for less competent pupils. Similarly in these lessons, teaching approaches are limited with insufficient regard to the different ways in which pupils learn. Pupils are expected to listen for too long or undertake tasks which require too little thought or effort from them.

Support for pupils identified as having special educational needs is securely established and highly effective. Identification procedures and individual learning plans keep pupils' progress under continual review. In-class support staff and additional lessons result in pupils making good progress. Some extension work is planned in some subjects for more able pupils but in general there are too few opportunities for specific enrichment activities as part of routine provision for these pupils.

Systems for assessment are satisfactory and further improvement is planned. Marking is regular and conscientious. There is guidance on effective marking which supplements the Focus marking policy, but further work is required to ensure consistent practice. In the best examples seen, teachers made clear to pupils why work is good and what needs to be done next to improve still further. This provides an effective model for wider dissemination. Target-setting is in place for all subjects and pupils' progress in all subjects is regularly assessed against National Curriculum levels of attainment. Teachers are increasingly using this process to motivate pupils through their knowing precisely how to improve their work to the next level. The school carries out a useful range of standardised tests as well as national tests to compare pupils' performance with that of pupils nationally.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school fulfils its aim of helping pupils to develop strong moral character, reach maturity and readily take on responsibilities within their families and community. Opportunities for pupils to develop an appreciation of other cultures are satisfactory. The school is working towards extending this aspect of pupils' experience.

Spiritual and moral development are good and underpinned by the Christian ethos of the school and the strong parental involvement. In Year 7 Bible studies, pupils reinforced their understanding of loyalty and family responsibility when studying the Book of Ruth. Pupils have a keen sense of fairness and know right from wrong. They are self-confident and grow in maturity, having a strong sense of responsibility for their own behaviour and knowing how they should treat others. The School Council's decision not to have prefects reinforces the belief that everyone has responsibility for the well-being of all. Pupils are courteous to staff and visitors, get on well together and are at ease in school. They have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and respond with excellent behaviour in class and around the school. Relationships with staff are very good, characterised by mutual respect and much good humour. This creates a secure and encouraging atmosphere so that pupils enjoy their learning and make good progress.

Social development is very good. Pupils enjoy school and their attendance is good. They work together enthusiastically when opportunities are given in lessons to collaborate on projects. Year 13 students effectively demonstrated this with their lively team approach to their Business Enterprise project. Pupils use their initiative to raise money for the school, and increasingly, for charities in the wider community. A substantial sum was collected for East Anglia Air Ambulance through the initiative of Year 11. The School Council is effective in helping pupils to understand decision-making and they take this responsibility seriously.

Pupils are developing a broad general knowledge of public institutions through topics in history, geography and the recently introduced citizenship course. Visits from a local Member of Parliament and a police officer have further extended pupils' understanding of public services.

Pupils are secure in their own faith and culture and the Christian ethos of the school underpins respect for others. Opportunities for learning about other cultures are satisfactory and improving. Pupils have had some opportunities to appreciate different customs: through assemblies, preparing food from other countries, reflecting on poetry and playing music from other traditions. These opportunities have not been progressively planned as pupils move through the school. The school is aware of this and the PSHE and citizenship programmes are beginning to ensure that pupils have more planned opportunities to learn about and appreciate other cultures and faiths.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for welfare, health and safety is satisfactory overall with some good aspects. The school adopts FLT documents and the current policies and procedures meet the requirements. Progress has been made on those action points identified in the previous inspection report. Recently, the school has begun to put in place arrangements to ensure that the regulatory requirements are sustained and can be checked regularly. The closer working between the health and safety officer, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and senior teacher is a positive development in this regard.

Care and concern for individual pupils and their welfare is taken seriously. All pupils are well looked after and supported. The requirements for safeguarding children are in place and appropriate training for staff is carried out. Pupils say they feel safe in school, know adults to whom they could turn if they had a concern, and are confident they would be listened to. They believe they get on well together at school and say there is very little bullying and that any instance is dealt with fairly. They are encouraged to eat healthily, and pupils have a good understanding of what contributes to a healthy lifestyle. In home economics they gain knowledge of what makes a good diet and enjoy regular PE sessions. The First-aid policy is supported by qualified members of staff. Risk assessments have been completed and records are adequate. Good administrative support helps to ensure that registers meet the requirements.

The school has in place a three-year plan that meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance with the Criminal Records Bureau. The school carries out other essential checks before staff appointments are confirmed, complying with the most recent legislation.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is housed in former business premises which have been extended and remodelled to provide suitable accommodation. Furnishing and maintenance are of high quality. Good use is made of the available space to create specialist provision including a library and art room; science laboratory; home economics area and information technology suite.

The limited outside hard surface area provides useful space for recreation. Nearby facilities offer suitable provision for sports and physical education.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The quality of information for parents

The school provides clear information to parents about its policies and procedures. Parents' view of the school is overwhelmingly positive and they believe they are well informed about their child's progress through regular reports and progress checks. Reports require further refinement to include clearer targets for improvement.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

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

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

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 Governing Body consists of eight Trustees who meet regularly. The Trust also governs and manages the Oak House primary school at Colchester, which is separately registered and therefore not part of this inspection.

Trustees provide a strategy for the development of the school and pupils within the ethos, according to Focus Learning Trust policies and meeting Charity Commission and other legal requirements. They ensure that resources are available to fulfil their aims.

The quality of the Board's performance could be improved by the setting of more clearly defined targets, communicating these to the management of the school and having in place procedures to review progress.

There is a clear management structure with all responsibilities allocated. Managers and support teams work together to ensure that this is a well run school with a vibrant and friendly atmosphere.

The Chief Executive Officer and Senior Teacher provide an experienced, dedicated and effective partnership which has markedly helped the school to make progress in many aspects over recent years. Current developments in the post 16 and primary phases and the wider demand for quality, suggest a review of their tasks so that each contributes his respective experience and skills to ensure the best possible outcome for the school. To this end, the Senior Teacher should have clear direction and authority from the Trustees, with the time and resources needed to meet targets set by the Board and address the issues raised in this report.

Formal weekly management meetings are essential to aid decision-making, promote efficiency and keep all Trustees informed of current developments and problems in the school. These are not yet established.

Relationships between the management and staff are very good. Focus Recruitment and Staff Development procedures are being implemented and these have been facilitated by the recent change to salaried pay.

Pastoral care is well provided for and the school has very few behaviour problems. Communication is generally good with some areas needing improvement, as mentioned above. Record keeping and office systems are very well organised.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

The school should pay careful attention to the recommendations in this part of the report.

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 Focus Learning Trust website: www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk