

Cumberland School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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

Cumberland School is an independent special day school located in a converted mainstream primary school on the edge of a residential area in south Preston. The school provides education mainly for pupils with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties (BESD). It also makes provision for a smaller number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and for pupils with additional learning needs including communication difficulties and attention deficit disorders. Some pupils join the school after a history of exclusion and long-term absence from mainstream schools or other special school provision. Since the last inspection, with the approval of the Department for Education, Cumberland has increased the number on roll for which it is registered. The school may accommodate up to 56 pupils aged from 11 to 16 years. There are currently 49 pupils on roll aged from 11 to 16 years, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs. Fourteen pupils are in the care of the local authority.

Cumberland School opened in April 2008; it was last inspected in June 2009 and is part of the Witherslack group of schools. The group operates nine schools across England each catering for pupils with special educational needs. Witherslack provide a school advisory board including a school improvement partner. They employ a speech and language therapist, psychotherapist and two educational psychologists who are shared between a small number of Witherslack schools in the local area. The school's headteacher was appointed in September 2011 and the deputy headteacher in January 2012.

The school aims to provide 'a quality secondary curriculum to young people who need a more specialised environment in order to meet their potential academic and social development.'

Evaluation of the school

Cumberland school provides a good quality of education. Pupils make good progress in their personal development and in their academic learning. This is because the good curriculum is tailor-made to match pupils' individual needs and is delivered by good quality teaching. Pupils make good gains in improving their behaviour and attitudes to learning. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural

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

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

development is good. Outstanding provision is made for pupils' welfare, health and safety. All the regulations for registration as an independent school are met. Arrangements for safeguarding meet all the requirements. Since the last inspection, improvements have been made to refine the assessment systems, develop the curriculum and to develop pupils' sense of responsibility for their own learning.

Quality of education

The curriculum and other activities are good in meeting the range of needs and interests of pupils. A broad and balanced range of subjects and experiences is personalised to individual pupils' needs and contributes well to pupils' good progress. The outcomes of initial assessments by speech and language therapists and the child psychologist are used in tandem with the recommendations of pupils' statements of special educational needs, to plan programmes of specific support and intervention. The result is a curriculum of core subjects based largely on the National Curriculum supplemented by a bespoke package which provides well for pupils to learn basic personal, social and educational skills.

The design of the curriculum is flexibly organised to take account of the maturing needs of pupils. In Year 7, pupils are taught in a 'nurture' group which is based upon a primary school model. Pupils stay mostly in one classroom, are taught mainly by the same teacher and are supported by two teaching assistants. This arrangement meets their social and emotional needs particularly well and enables excellent relationships to be built upon which are sustained given the time together in a familiar surrounding. This helps pupils to improve their self confidence. In Year 8 and 9, the curriculum is organised into a two-year cycle so that pupils may be placed in one of two teaching groups. Pupils are grouped according to the outcomes of their assessments so that, for example, pupils with autistic spectrum disorders may be grouped together. By the end of Year 9, pupils are grouped into largely ability based classes in order to best provide for the specific courses leading to external accreditation, vocational opportunities and work experience in Key Stage 4.

A range of external partnerships enriches the curriculum and broadens opportunities for pupils. These include links with a local college to provide Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses in small animal care and football. The college is to provide taster sessions this year with a view to expanding the range of options available in the academic year 2012/13. Also, other links provide a BTEC in construction, hair and beauty and music and media.

Overall, the effectiveness of teaching and assessment in meeting the full range of pupils' needs is good. Monitoring carried out by the group's advisory board and the senior leaders in the school show that the quality of teaching is improving. These judgements show that the proportion of good and better lessons increased from about half of all lessons during the last academic year and the autumn term 2011, to around two thirds of lessons during the current term. Observations during this inspection confirm this profile. All teaching is at least satisfactory. A key part of this improvement is the impact of professional development for staff arising out of the

monitoring procedures. However, there are few opportunities provided for staff to share the best teaching practice in the school, to help improve satisfactory teaching to good and good teaching to outstanding. Pupils say that most lessons are interesting and help them to improve their learning. The good teaching is contributing strongly to pupils making mostly good progress.

Good and outstanding teaching is characterised by very good relationships between staff and pupils and consistent expectations of pupils' behaviour, which improve their attitudes to learning and aid the progress made. Effective questioning techniques are used by many teachers which help pupils to develop and extend their understanding. Checks on pupils' learning are made frequently in the best lessons and some groups of pupils also peer-assess their work. When this works well, it is a powerful way to accelerate pupils' progress because pupils relate very well to each other and willingly share their ideas. For example, pupils in an information and communication technology lesson assessed each other's computer graphic designs suggesting improvements and making comparisons to commercially available products. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed to support pupils' learning as well as their behaviour.

In satisfactory lessons there is often too much talk and instruction from the teacher, which results in pupils losing interest. In these lessons too much time is spent listening to the teacher talking before the main activity begins. Also, some lessons use too many worksheet-based activities which restricts the style of learning for pupils and does not always meet their needs. Occasionally, due to a lack of preparation by the teacher, pupils become frustrated with teaching resources which are either hard to see, because they are too small, or difficult to understand.

The use of assessment is much improved since the last inspection. Teachers' planning makes mostly effective use of the assessment information on pupils' National Curriculum levels of attainment and combines this with considerations of the targets for pupils' personal development in their individual education plans. However, there is some variation across different subjects and not all teachers make full use of the assessment information.

Examples of pupils' work, analysis of school data over time and observations of lessons show that pupils mostly make good progress in their learning. Inspection analysis shows that an increasing proportion of pupils are making progress above the expected rate, especially in English and science. Progress in mathematics is not as strong. There is a clear link between the rate of progress and the level of pupils' attendance. Pupils who have at least average or better attendance make at least average or better progress. The vast majority of pupils are in this group. A small minority of pupils who are persistently absent make less than expected progress.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Due to the consistent application of the school's procedures and strategies, pupils' behaviour

and their moral development are good. Pupils develop increasing confidence and self-esteem because staff take every opportunity to praise and encourage their achievements. Overall, pupils' attendance is below average but improving. The school has suitable procedures in place to encourage pupils to attend well and to quickly intervene where efforts are not successful. In particular, pupils who are persistently absent have an attendance support plan which details the extensive involvement of external agencies.

All pupils take part in outdoor adventurous activities such as rock climbing and raft building and these provide some exhilarating and spiritually uplifting experiences. They help pupils to develop team-building skills requiring cooperation and perseverance. There are good social opportunities for individual pupils and groups such as going out for a meal, visiting the cinema and going shopping. The election process for the school council is used well to help pupils learn about British local and national government and democracy. Opportunities for pupils to develop their cultural awareness are provided through the curriculum. For example, in a geography lesson, pupils learnt about the Maasai lifestyle, their clothing, eating habits and tribal beliefs. There are limited first-hand experiences for pupils to learn about other faiths and cultures. For example, no visits are arranged to visits places of worship other than the Christian church located next to the school. There are no links with other schools or communities in contrasting cultural contexts.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils is outstanding. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Staff induction attends exceptionally well to safeguarding procedures and these are regularly monitored to ensure their full implementation. Prior to admission, staff visit pupils' previous schools and their homes to assess pupils' needs. All pupils have individual risk assessments to evaluate potential risk to themselves and others and these are reviewed regularly. Pupils contribute to this process. A key worker is allocated to every pupil to provide personalised support. Staff are highly vigilant in their supervision and care of pupils. They watch carefully for any sign of a pupil's changing behaviour, appearance or mood. Pupils say that they feel safe and are looked after well by staff. A strong pastoral team ensures that rewards and sanctions are used in sensible balance and are understood by pupils. The sanctions record is used to help pupils reflect on their actions and behaviour. As one pupil said, 'Staff help me to improve my behaviour by talking to me after I have calmed down.' Pupils are consulted about healthy lunches and the breakfast club is attended by all. Opportunities for physical exercise are plentiful including competitive sports.

All the required policies and procedures are in place for the health and safety of pupils and staff. Training is provided beyond what is normally expected. All staff are trained in first aid, physical restraint and child protection procedures. Fire risk assessments, staff training for fire prevention and regular checks on fire procedures and equipment are all first class.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Arrangements to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors meet all requirements and checks are recorded on the single central register as required.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school's premises and accommodation make a good contribution to pupils' learning. The listed building has been sensitively restored to provide modern internal fittings and furnishings. Facilities include a science laboratory, technology room, music room, art room and several bright classrooms. Additionally, there is a spacious hall which also serves as a dining room. Well equipped offices are provided with modern technology. Outside there is a good-sized hard surfaced playground and a playing field.

Provision of information

The school has an informative website which contains useful information for parents and carers and for local authorities regarding the aims, policies and expectations of the school and the Witherslack group. Also, a good range of written information is made available to parents and carers at the time of admission. The school sends detailed annual reports about the progress and attainment of each pupil as required. Similarly, annual accounts are sent to each placing local authority.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's policies and procedures meet all the requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets all 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:

- eradicate any inconsistencies in teachers' use of assessment information when planning lessons and share the outstanding practice in the school more widely to further increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons
- improve cultural opportunities for pupils, by providing new links to schools and communities in contrasting cultural environments
- improve the attendance of the small minority of persistently absent pupils so as to improve their rate of academic progress and raise their achievement.

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 day school		
Type of school	Special school for pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties		
Date school opened	April 2008		
Age range of pupils	11–16 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 33	Girls: 16	Total: 49
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 33	Girls: 16	Total: 49
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 8	Girls: 6	Total: 14
Annual fees (day pupils)	£29,390 to £68,651		
Address of school	Church Road Bamber Bridge Preston Lancashire PR5 6EP		
Telephone number	01772 284435		
Email address	office@cumberlandschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Nigel Hunt		
Proprietor	Mr M Barrow		

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.



8 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cumberland School, Preston PR5 6EP

Thank you for welcoming me into your school when I visited you recently. I thoroughly enjoyed my time with you and would like to share with you what I found out about your school. I judged that Cumberland School is a good school. These are the main reasons why I judged the school to be good.

- The good curriculum, which has many out-of-school visits, combined with good teaching, helps you to make good progress in lessons.
- The staff look after you very well. You said that they care about you and I agree. The school provides outstandingly well for your welfare, health and safety.
- You are good at improving your behaviour because you try hard and the staff are consistent in using rewards and sanctions fairly.

All schools need to develop and improve and I have asked that even more of your lessons should become good and outstanding. Also, I have asked that you are given more opportunities to learn about other cultures. Finally, the school needs to make sure that those of you who do not attend school regularly improve your attendance so that you make better progress in your learning. Some of you must help by trying harder to attend school every day.

Thank you once again for all your help. I wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

John Coleman
Her Majesty's Inspector