

West Cumbria Learning Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112096
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	378422
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2012
Lead inspector	Terry McKenzie

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Pupil Referral Unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	28
Appropriate authority	The management committee
Chair	Michael Priestley
Headteacher	Lisa Balderstone
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2010
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Introduction

Inspection team

Terry McKenzie

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed four lessons taught by four teachers, an off-site sports activity and the arrangements made for younger pupils. The inspector observed the work of the unit and spoke with students. Meetings were held with members of the management committee, senior managers and staff. The inspector took account of the responses to the online Parent View survey in planning the inspection. Some of the important policies and documents such as for safeguarding were scrutinised, as were improvement plans, the unit's own evaluations and assessment information. The two questionnaires returned by parents and carers were analysed as were those completed by students and staff.

Information about the school

West Cumbria Learning Centre provides for students who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion from their mainstream primary or secondary schools. The unit also caters for those in hospital and for a few who receive home tuition. All are regarded as having special educational needs and a few have a statement of special educational needs. Many have social, emotional or behavioural difficulties and most have experienced disrupted periods of education before arriving at the unit. Numbers fluctuate and can change daily. Students come from the towns of West Cumbria, almost all are of White British heritage and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is very high. Some are part time, many dual registered with other schools and students often stay for only a very short time.

Since the last inspection in 2010, a new deputy headteacher has been appointed. The local authority is currently reviewing the nature of the provision. The Key Stage 2 area has recently been developed to include an outside classroom.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key Findings

- This is a satisfactory pupil referral unit because most students successfully re-engage with education following times of turmoil in their lives. It has improved since the last inspection but is not of consistently good quality because students do not make as much progress as they could and teaching and the curriculum are not yet good. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- For the different groups of students progress is satisfactory but in Key Stage 2 it is good. Older students gain GCSEs and other accreditations. Systems have not yet been fully devised and implemented to provide the information about students' achievements that would clearly demonstrate exactly how much progress they make.
- Teaching is satisfactory with much that is good but there are missed opportunities for teachers to accelerate students' progress. Teachers too often plan for what is to be done in lessons rather than what is learned.
- Students' behaviour is good as are their attitudes to learning. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and they mainly enjoy lessons because they are supported well. Students report they feel safe in school and bullying is rare. Their attendance is low compared to most schools nationally but for many it improves over time from prior very low levels.
- The improving leadership and management are satisfactory overall and good in Key Stage 2. However, recent changes to the content and style of learning have not yet had time to become fully effective despite recent developments in monitoring the work of teachers. The management committee has undergone some reorganisation recently and members are beginning to offer better quality support to the senior leaders and to play their part in maintaining and improving staff morale. This is not yet fully effective, however.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of lessons and the curriculum to good or better so that students are more motivated to attend regularly, engage in learning and make better progress in their studies by ensuring that:
 - lesson tasks are better matched to students' levels of ability
 - the pace of lessons is sufficient to maintain students' engagement
 - teachers' planning includes details of what will be learned in lessons as well as what will be taught.
- Improve the rate of students' progress by:
 - devising and implementing information-handling systems that provide better clarity about the small steps of progress that students make
 - using up-to-date assessment information to help set more meaningful and challenging targets for students during lessons.
- Raise the morale of the staff by improving the effectiveness of the management committee in providing high-quality support to the senior leaders and other staff at the unit.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Students arrive at the unit with attainment generally well below national averages because most have experienced disrupted periods of education. Nevertheless, most adapt quickly to the individual arrangements made for them and through improving their attendance and behaviour they engage better in learning. They relate well to adults because of the quality of support provided. Consequently, and often for the first time, they learn to settle into lessons and make progress in their learning. Good behaviour strategies and clear boundaries set by staff are effective in helping students to overcome their difficulties. For example, in a Key Stage 2 literacy lesson, the staff persisted so that pupils overcame their frustrations and maintained their efforts successfully.

The attainment of the great majority of students remains well below national expectations but in Key Stage 2 they quickly begin to close the gap with their mainstream peers because they overcome their difficulties with learning more rapidly. However, all groups of students make at least satisfactory progress and in some lessons where teachers focus on challenging individuals with personal learning targets, progress is good. For example, in a science lesson Key Stage 3 students were learning about the function and structure of the kidney through dissection. Students were clear about the expectations of the lesson and one stated that he looks forward to science lessons because he enjoys the challenges. The very small number of questionnaires returned by parents and carers were supportive of the unit and were in agreement with the inspection findings that their children make progress here. The number and quality of passes at GCSE have improved every year for the last three years so that the outcomes are gradually moving closer to those expected for all students nationally. However, systems to monitor achievement are not developed sufficiently to provide a clear picture of the small steps of progress that students often make.

The unit encourages the development of basic skills and it is noticeable that students arrive promptly to take part in the literacy programme that occurs at the start of each day. Here, students feel confident about practising and developing their literacy skills in small groups. They enjoy these sessions during which they play Scrabble or devise nonsense poems. Students contribute well and there are early signs that these sessions are having a positive effect on students' reading and spelling.

Through the newly emerging curriculum, a wider range of off-site activities is delivered. Students were observed developing their rugby skills with a specialist instructor from the community. Each week students undertake outdoor education that helps them develop communication skills and work cooperatively. These activities are starting to be successful in encouraging some to attend more regularly and to be included in learning that they might not have experienced previously. A positive outcome of this is that students learn to be supportive of each other and to follow the rules. Consequently, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good.

Quality of teaching

The inspection confirmed leaders' views that teaching is satisfactory overall and improving. In most lessons students are keen to engage and make a positive contribution. Mostly, teachers provide a range of interesting activities that keep the students willingly on task. Some teachers have clear expectations and understanding of what should be achieved in a lesson and in these circumstances progress is good. However, too often there is only a limited matching of tasks to ability and sometimes the pace is too slow. The majority of teachers are still planning their lessons to describe what will occur rather than what students will learn. Students' progress is sometimes limited because the school does not yet utilise assessment information sufficiently well to provide meaningful and challenging targets to guide learning.

A number of staff expressed concerns through their questionnaires that the management of students' behaviour presented difficulties but this was not borne out by inspection evidence. Staff were often observed skilfully handling challenging behaviour and adjusting lessons quickly to prevent students from losing concentration. For example, in a mathematics lesson a teacher realised that the students were struggling with the theoretical understanding of fractions and utilised a handy packet of biscuits to exemplify the explanations and maintain interest. As part of the literacy initiative teachers are encouraged to consider communication in their lesson planning and teachers now emphasise the key vocabulary and language required in a lesson.

The high staff ratio enables those who require it to have almost individual attention. The quality of support is generally effective and the unit has made some of the progress required from the last inspection in planning the work of teaching assistants more effectively. Consequently, the majority of students are fully included in learning in class and have opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. Students report that they mainly enjoy lessons. Some told the inspector that the unit was good at engaging them and providing opportunities that they would not otherwise have had to gain qualifications. These successes in learning and the personal developments that they make in their behaviour and social skills enable many to return to mainstream school to continue their education.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is generally good and seen in students' welcoming demeanour and the high levels of support they give to each other. Another visitor to the unit commented that 'this good behaviour is how it usually is!' The unit's records indicate that for the great majority of students behaviour improves in their time here and is positively influenced by the rewards and consequences system. Almost all students have experienced difficulties in managing their behaviour and this has often been instrumental in their failure to cope in a mainstream setting. However, the unit is effective in aiding students to understand their own behaviours and to deal with them better so that learning can take place. Many return quickly to their mainstream schools following their reintegration with learning at the unit. One student recounted that he had been at the unit for a number of years but remains optimistic that through the persistence of the staff his behaviour will eventually improve enough for him to return to his mainstream school. Many students have previously experienced extended periods of absence from school. However, upon starting at the unit most improve their attendance and punctuality and records indicate that attendance has improved generally at the unit every year since 2009.

Students report that they feel safe at the unit as a consequence of learning to manage their own behaviour and utilise their improved social and moral skills. They reported that there are occasional incidents of bullying or aggressive behaviour but that these are quickly dealt with by staff and resolved. None was unduly concerned about physical, emotional or cyber-bullying or harassment. Students explained that the procedures of the unit were effective in helping them to attend without feeling threatened in any way. Parents and carers confirm through their questionnaires that their children feel safe and no concerns about behaviour were registered.

Leadership and management

The satisfactory leadership and management have continued to improve the work of the unit since the last inspection. The headteacher has steered the unit through a difficult period of uncertainty and change, sometimes being required to make unpopular decisions. The unit has not always enjoyed effective support from its management committee but this is changing. The local authority employs the majority of members of the committee. Members express a renewed sense of commitment to the unit. Two members explained how they are already bringing additional useful resources to the unit, providing valuable assistance to staff and their support is beginning to raise the morale of staff.

Improvements in the quality of teaching have resulted from better performance management procedures and monitoring of the quality of teaching. Recent changes to the curriculum have established better outcomes for students and ensured that almost all are fully included and none discriminated against. For example, they attend better, their behaviour and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is now good and they engage more in their classes so that the rate of their progress is increasing. This indicates a satisfactory capacity for leaders and managers to engineer further improvement such as building on the already effective liaisons with students' families. More-nurturing methods of behaviour management have had the positive effect of reducing punishments and exclusions. Other services such as the hospital education and home tuition have integrated smoothly and staff working in these areas report that management is effective. The arrangements for safeguarding are in accordance with requirements. Senior leaders know

the service well, their self-evaluations are generally accurate and they understand the priorities for development.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



29 June 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of West Cumbria Learning Centre, Workington, CA14 4PJ

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your unit recently. I very much appreciated meeting you, talking with you, seeing you in your classrooms and around the school.

Your pupil referral unit is satisfactory and improving. Mostly, you make satisfactory progress in your studies but your behaviour is good as is the development of your spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Your literacy skills are improving through the work that you do in the PROPEL groups in the mornings. This helps you to get more from your lessons and gives you confidence to join in and contribute. Teaching and the curriculum are satisfactory and there are signs that they are improving. Your attendance is improving because you want to experience success. The adults work hard to support your efforts in class so that you are included and provided with the support that you need. You report that you feel safe and mainly enjoy attending. The unit is satisfactorily led and managed by the headteacher.

Nevertheless, there is plenty of room for improvement. I would like the teachers to provide you with lessons that are even more interesting and matched better to your individual needs and levels of ability. This will help you to make better progress in class and these successes will encourage some of you to attend even more regularly. The unit urgently requires a better system for recording your attainments and progress and I have asked the headteacher to do this. The management committee of the local authority has been asked to be more involved with the unit and to provide better support to the staff.

Once again, thank you for your interest in the inspection. I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Terry McKenzie
Lead inspector

