

West Cumbria Learning Centre

Toll Bar, Distington, Workington, Cumbria, CA14 4PJ

Inspection dates 11–12 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- The capacity for securing continued improvement is too limited because managers have not acted swiftly enough to establish a strong and permanent leadership team.
- Recent improvements in all areas of the centre are too reliant on external support and heavily dependent on a temporary leadership team which is coming to the end of its tenure.
- The management committee has not been fastidious in holding leaders to account about the impact of their actions on students' progress.
- Students' achievement and the quality of teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 have not improved enough since the last inspection and require improvement.
- Not enough students gain appropriate qualifications at a level which will support them in the next stages of their education, training or employment.
- The very recent improvements in teaching are not yet secure. Teaching is sometimes uninspiring and expectations of what students can achieve are not always high enough in Key Stages 3 and 4.
- The recent improvements in how adults manage students' behaviour have not become fully embedded in the centre. Some students still rely heavily on adults to help them manage their own behaviour.
- Attendance remains poor for a small minority of students, particularly at Key Stage 4.

The school has the following strengths

- Adults have a deep understanding of students' individual needs and build good relationships with them. These strengths help to secure a high rate of student reintegration back into mainstream school.
- Good progress is made by pupils in Key Stage 2 and those students in the Hospital and Home Tuition Service.
- The high morale of the dedicated staff team is a strength of the centre.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 10 lessons, two of which were jointly observed with the associate headteacher. They observed six teachers.
- Inspectors talked to two groups of students about their views of the centre.
- Inspectors talked with senior staff, a representative of the local authority and the Chair of the Management Committee.
- Inspectors listened to students read during their lessons and talked to them about the work they were doing. Inspectors also looked at students' work in their files and exercise books and on displays around the centre.
- Inspectors looked at pupil progress files.
- A wide range of documentation was looked at, including that relating to students' safety, their progress, plans for improvement and minutes of meetings held by the management committee.
- Nineteen parents responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- Fourteen members of staff submitted responses to the voluntary Ofsted questionnaire during the inspection.
- On the first day of the inspection, the majority of students were out of the centre on a pre-arranged visit to the theatre. No lessons were seen on day one of the inspection.
- During this inspection, inspectors asked additional questions designed to ascertain the school's view of the impact and effectiveness of local authority services to support school improvement. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the use, quality and impact of those services.

Inspection team

Drew Crawshaw, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christina McIntosh

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 44 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended), Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Information about this school

- West Cumbria Learning Centre is the pupil referral unit for the west of Cumbria.
- The centre offers education for students across Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. It works with students who have been or are at risk of permanent exclusion and those who are not attending school for other reasons such as illness (mental or physical) or pregnancy.
- The centre works with students on-site, at their own school, in their own home or in hospitals.
- The centre is funded for 50 full-time equivalent places. At the time of inspection it had 43 students on roll. Students are given places on a full-time or part-time basis and most retain their links with their mainstream school to which they often return. Students attend often for very short periods of time.
- A small number of students attend the Hospital and Home Tuition Service based at the centre with some students taking part in a wide range of on-site and off-site activities designed to build their self-confidence.
- All students are regarded as having special educational needs and some have a statement of special educational needs.
- Many students have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and most have experienced a period of disrupted education prior to becoming on roll at the centre.
- The proportion of students for whom the centre receives pupil premium funding (additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families, and those children that are looked after by the local authority) is high.
- Although the centre is eligible to receive additional school sports funding for use with primary age children along with Year 7 catch-up premium to support weaker readers, it had not received either of these grants at the time of the inspection.
- Since the last inspection in June 2012 a number of new staff have taken up post at the centre. At the time of the inspection the centre was being led by an interim headteacher supported by a temporary associate headteacher. This leadership team has been in post since September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build leadership capacity and develop a clear succession plan so that leadership is distributed across the centre and is not over-reliant on the headteacher or external support by:
 - taking swift action to ensure an effective leadership team is in place which is rigorously held to account by the management committee
 - developing middle leaders by ensuring all teachers and support staff have a progression plan for their professional development and its impact is rigorously checked.
- Ensure leaders and managers fully evaluate the impact of their actions to improve the centre by effectively checking key areas such as:
 - the attendance of all groups of students
 - the longer term success of those students who reintegrate back into mainstream school and

those students who leave the centre at the end of Key Stage 4

- the number and type of incidents relating to the behaviour of students while at the centre
- the small, but significant, steps in progress made by students who attend the centre for either short periods of time or on a part-time basis.

■ Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 in order to accelerate students' progress and lift their attainment by:

- ensuring planned changes to the curriculum are implemented fully and support students to gain appropriate qualifications
- giving staff the opportunity to see outstanding practice in other schools and monitoring the impact of actions taken as a result on students' progress
- ensuring that good practices already seen in some areas of the centre, are shared effectively across the centre: for example, in teachers' marking, teachers' planning, the use of detailed small-steps assessment to identify students' progress and the use of classroom displays to support learning.

■ An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of management maybe improved. The external review of governance should also include a specific focus on the impact of pupil premium spending.

Ofsted will make recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the centre.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students in Key Stages 3 and 4, including the most-able students, do not make the progress they are capable of. Not enough students leave Key Stage 4 with qualifications which will support them effectively in the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- The achievement of students in Key Stage 4 is hampered by the poor attendance of a small minority of students. These students miss too many lessons and therefore their progress is not good. The achievement of students in Key Stage 3 requires improvement because the progress they make across all subjects is too varied.
- Students' achievement in English and mathematics requires improvement. It has not improved quickly enough since the previous inspection. In 2013, a lower proportion of students gained accreditation in both English and mathematics than in the previous year. Teachers in charge of English and mathematics have introduced a wider range of qualifications more suitable to the varying ability levels of students at the centre. While teacher assessment indicates that all students have made good progress since the introduction of these qualifications in September 2013; it is too early to judge the impact on overall progress.
- Literacy and numeracy skills are now being developed in subjects other than English and mathematics. Leaders of mathematics and English have given support to other teachers in how to develop numeracy and literacy skills in other subjects. While it is too early to judge the impact of this action, evidence was seen in science books of students responding effectively to being asked to use more interesting words in order to improve their writing about the use of fuels.
- In Key Stage 2, progress is good. The well-organised and vibrant teaching area, coupled with a thorough understanding of the needs of all the students, results in nearly all students making good progress over time. This was confirmed by looking at students' books, which clearly showed how they develop their writing from one lesson to the next.
- Variations in the achievement of students across the centre show that efforts to promote equality of opportunity are not yet effective. However, pupil premium money has been added to by the centre to purchase a reading support package for use by all students. As a result the vast majority of students who access this package make good progress in their reading. In a few cases, students for whom the centre receives pupil premium begin to close the gap in reading age when compared to their peers.
- Vulnerable students, who have their needs met through the Hospital and Home Tuition Service, make good progress. This is because staff adopt an appropriate balance between nurture and preparing the students for reintegration to mainstream school. Vulnerable students each have a detailed individual education plan and take part in a range of on- and off-site activities which prepare them effectively for their move back to mainstream school.
- The vast majority of students attend the centre for short periods of time or on a part-time basis, it is therefore difficult to measure the progress made by some students. Leaders are developing more accurate means of assessing the small steps that students make while on roll at the centre. However, the high number of students in Key Stages 2 and 3, who either reduce their time at the centre or reintegrate fully into a mainstream school demonstrates the good progress made by this group.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The inspection confirmed leaders' views that teaching is not good because it has not improved sufficiently since the last inspection to ensure students make good progress overall. There is too much variation in the quality of teaching across the centre and especially between key stages. Recent changes, such as the insistence by leaders that teachers' planning identifies what students are expected to learn, are not always used effectively to support students' progress.
- Samples of lessons were seen where the quality of teaching was not consistently good. At times

teaching is uninspiring and does not take advantage of the teachers' knowledge of how individual students prefer to learn. Consequently, students soon get bored; they switch off from learning and their progress slows. Conversely, when teachers were seen to make their lessons relevant to the students, for example, by making reference to real-life situations in science, students remained interested and wanted to learn. In these situations, students make good and sometimes better progress.

- Teachers' marking is not used effectively across the centre to support learning. In some subjects, students' work is given national curriculum levels to show them how well they are progressing. On other occasions, teachers' marking tells student that they have done well but does not explain why. As a result, students are not clear about what they should do to improve next time.
- The teaching of literacy skills, including reading and numeracy skills, in subjects other than English and mathematics is not consistently good. However, in some subjects, such as food technology and science, opportunities are taken to apply the whole-school approaches for teaching literacy and numeracy. Here students can be seen to improve their writing and to use whole-school mathematics strategies to work out quantities of ingredients for themselves.
- Centre staff have a detailed understanding of the needs of individual students and build good relationships with them. They are passionate about supporting vulnerable students but this sometimes leads to a small number of staff lowering their expectations of what students are capable of. On occasions, adults are too quick to answer or ask questions which lead students too readily to the answer. In these cases, students do not make the progress they are able to nor do they build their self-confidence.
- Students make good progress in their personal development when staff challenge students to think for themselves. In a lesson about choices and consequences, the teacher asked, 'Why is it a good choice?' This simple and well-timed question prompted the student to reflect on his previous answer and made a real contribution to improving his understanding of consequences.
- The majority of classrooms provide a learning environment which inspires students to want to learn. These classrooms have colourful and relevant displays which inform students about the subjects being taught. Even more powerful displays contain examples of students' work, for example in the English classroom. These are used to demonstrate to other students what they need to do in order to reach the next level. A few classrooms are uninspiring and so teachers are missing opportunities to enhance students' learning.
- Teaching in Key Stage 2 is consistently good. Teaching is organised effectively. Even those students who attend only one or two sessions at the centre each week benefit from the clear structure and routine. Students' work in their books and files demonstrates that teachers' marking is effective in supporting the students to make good progress especially in their literacy and numeracy skills. This is because teachers' comments about what the student can do to improve are clear and to the point.
- The progress made by students who attend the Hospital and Home Tuition Service, either on site or as a result of home visits by centre staff, is good because of the good teaching. Teachers match their lessons effectively to the individual needs of the students. As a result almost all students are reintegrated back into mainstream schools.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Students' attitudes towards all aspects of learning are not consistently good across the centre. A small minority of older students do not attend the centre often enough. Students who attend more regularly display a positive attitude when in class and around the centre due to the skills of adults who successfully encourage students to participate in all manner of activities.
- The good relationships between adults and students, which are quickly established because each student is assigned a key worker, are evident throughout the centre. Adults take every opportunity to interact positively with students. As a result nearly all students respond

appropriately to requests made by adults. Inspectors saw no incidents of poor behaviour impacting on the learning of others.

- Students were seen to be polite and courteous towards adults within the centre although they were hesitant when meeting visitors. On the occasions when students were heard to swear at one another or to make comments which were anti-social, adults acted swiftly but in a measured way to address effectively students' behaviour.
- The centre's behaviour policy is truly a team effort and is effective in helping students whose attendance is consistently good to improve their behaviour rapidly and, as a result, return back to mainstream school quickly. Adults use a mixture of rewards and sanctions, applied consistently well, to encourage students to take personal responsibility for their actions. Students are able to see how well they are progressing by looking at the behaviour points charts which are displayed prominently in and around their classrooms. This helps students to improve their self-confidence.
- Parents have no well-founded concerns about the behaviour of their children in the centre and the students who spoke with inspectors said that while bullying did take place on rare occasions it was dealt with effectively by adults. Inspectors found no corroborating evidence for this. The centre does not keep an anti-bullying log. Inspectors were assured by leaders that they had already taken action to address this issue by installing an online bullying reporting system onto the centre's website. At the time of the inspection no reports had been filed.
- The centre takes appropriate action to keep students safe while they are either in the centre or on external activities. All staff are trained appropriately in how to intervene when students are unable to manage their own behaviour. Appropriate safety checks are made on all new employees and effective risk assessments are in place for all activities accessed by the students.

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Leaders and managers at all levels have not acted effectively to successfully address all the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Although there have been some recent improvements in the quality of teaching and in students' behaviour, students' progress overall is not good and the attendance of a small minority of students in Key Stage 4 is poor.
- The capacity for securing further improvement is limited. Recent improvements have been led by an interim leadership team introduced to the centre by the local authority. Leaders, consisting of a temporary headteacher and a part-time associate headteacher, have successfully galvanised the staff team which is eager to move forward and improve the centre. However, the centre is currently over reliant on this external support. Plans made by the management committee, to replace the interim leadership team in January 2014, revolve around temporary appointments and therefore the quality of leadership is too fragile.
- Managers have not been effective in holding leaders to account about the pace of improvement in students' achievement and the quality of teaching. Records of management committee meetings show that managers rely heavily on data provided by leaders and do not effectively challenge leaders about the impact of their actions. For example, while managers are clear about how pupil premium money is spent they are not clear about the impact of this spending because specific measures of success have not been identified.
- Leaders have not done enough to secure good attendance for all students on roll at the centre. They do not regularly analyse attendance data in sufficient detail and therefore poor attendance by some groups, for example Key Stage 4 students, has gone unchallenged. Poor attendance by these students limits the amount of progress they make while at the centre.
- The interim leadership team has taken effective action to make some quick gains. Leaders have made themselves highly visible around centre and lead from the front. As a result the staff team is on board and is willing to implement the changes required to improve the centre.
- Leaders now regularly hold teachers to account. Teachers have used the feedback given to them following observations of their teaching, to improve their classroom practices. Leaders' self-

evaluation of the quality of teaching shows that teaching and the rate of students' progress in lessons have both recently improved although there is more improvement required. Observations of teaching and the scrutiny of work by inspectors during the inspection, confirms that leaders' self-evaluation is accurate.

- The use of teacher appraisal has not been effective in ensuring the centre becomes good. Centre records show that almost all teachers are paid at the upper pay level despite teaching across the centre being judged to require improvement. A new system of managing teacher performance has been planned by the interim leadership team with targets being focussed on the centre's improvement priorities. This system is yet to be introduced and therefore its impact cannot be evaluated. Newly qualified teachers should not be appointed.
- Recent changes have ensured that the curriculum is sufficiently well balanced to meet the needs of most of the students. Leaders have increased the number of accredited courses available to older students and plans have been made to increase the use of vocational courses provided by alternative providers. Effective steps are taken to support the students' spiritual, moral and social development. A wide range of opportunities are offered to students including theatre visits, visits by outside speakers, being involved in community projects and time for reflection. As a result students often improve their self-confidence and this supports their transition back to mainstream school.
- Although the centre attempts to ensure the needs of all students are catered for, not all students are given an equal opportunity to access the centre's facilities and staff because attendance for some remains too low. For example, on the day of the inspection a theatre visit had been arranged, all students, including those who do not normally attend on that day, had been invited to attend, but attendance was still not good.
- Plans for spending the primary school sports funding have not been established by leaders at the time of the inspection. Leaders were unclear when this funding would be received.
- The centre's safeguarding procedures meet requirements.
- The local authority has not been effective in helping the centre improve rapidly since the previous inspection. The local authority has not held senior leaders to account effectively and, as a result, poor performance has gone unchecked. However, more recent support, including that given to establish the interim leadership team, has been effective in initiating change within the centre. The local authority general advisor has given direct support to the leadership team in the form of advice and audit reports following lesson observations and the scrutiny of students' work. This action has challenged the centre to produce an accurate self-evaluation of its progress and has contributed to the recent improvements seen in teaching and achievement. Both the interim headteacher and the Chair of the Management Committee say they value the support given by the local authority to the centre.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The management committee has not been effective in holding leaders to account. As a result the centre has not made the progress it needed to in order to become a good school. Managers have not systematically challenged centre leaders about progress being made by the centre. They have relied heavily on data and judgements given to them by centre leaders and not taken action to verify evidence on a regular enough basis. As a result the management committee have had, until recently, an overly positive picture of the centre. The accurate self-evaluation document produced by the interim leadership team has given the management committee a much needed wake-up call. The management committee now has an accurate picture of how well the centre is performing and has taken action by assigning specific members to monitor the progress of aspects of the centre's improvement plan.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	112096
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	428871

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	43
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Priestley
Headteacher	Philip Kaye
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2012
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