

West Cumbria Learning Centre

Toll Bar, Distington, Workington, Cumbria CA14 4PJ

Inspection dates

24–25 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Outstanding, decisive leadership by the headteacher since her appointment in 2014 has successfully turned the centre around. Morale is high. Staff, parents and carers are rightly highly satisfied with the work of the centre.
- Members of the Management Committee hold leaders to full account. All have a clear view of where refinements and development are needed in their aim to be the best.
- The centre's standing within the community has risen as a result of highly effective links with schools, families and other agencies. Tailored programmes and placements meet pupils' emotional, social and academic needs.
- An increasing proportion of pupils are returning to mainstream schools because of the success of the 12-week programme to help them to manage their behaviour and to see purpose in learning.
- Achievement is rising. In 2015, for the first time, all Year 11 pupils left with at least one qualification and 25% gained five or more GCSEs.
- Pupils value being listened to and being given a second chance to learn. They make good progress over time, especially in writing and mathematics, due to good-quality teaching.
- Skilful questioning by teachers helps pupils to link well new information to what they already know.
- Behaviour, attendance and attitude improve markedly once pupils settle in. Parents refer to the often 'incredible change for the better' in their children's self-confidence and self-esteem as a result of support and guidance from staff.
- Staff's high expectations of pupils' behaviour and engagement in lessons are matched by exceptional teamwork in dealing swiftly with any behaviour incidents. Staff also sustain pupils' interest in learning very well.
- All staff are vigilant in identifying issues that affect each pupil's progress and welfare. Their shared concern as well as calm, encouraging approach ensure a very supportive, family atmosphere.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The rate and amount of progress made by pupils is sometimes variable, particularly in reading, science and the humanities.
- Not all teachers highlight well enough how and when pupils meet their targets. This slows the pupils' progress in being resilient learners and in judging for themselves how well they are doing.
- The school's clear priorities for improvement are not all linked closely to specific outcomes for pupils' progress, achievement and personal development. As a result, it is difficult for leaders to determine exactly how well their actions have raised standards.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate further the rate of pupils' progress in reading, science and the humanities by implementing agreed plans for guided reading and for strengthening the curriculum in science and the humanities.
- Strengthen pupils' resilience as learners and their awareness of their own progress by ensuring that teaching staff help pupils to (a) know what they must do to excel in the set task and (b) realise when they have met their targets and/or what they must do to meet them.
- Provide a stronger basis for determining the effectiveness of action taken to raise standards by specifying more clearly in the improvement plan the expected outcomes in pupils' progress, achievement and personal development.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

is outstanding

- The key to the centre's overall improvement is the headteacher's firm leadership and her skill in inspiring, encouraging and working with the staff. Consequently, staff have taken on new working practices which have proved to be effective in raising the quality of teaching and learning, and in strengthening outcomes for pupils. This has led to an upsurge in confidence and a collective wish to sustain the momentum of improvement.
- All acknowledge that the centre has changed for the better since the inspection in December 2013. Morale has soared and there is a tangible, shared ambition for the centre to be outstanding in all areas.
- Staff, parents and pupils hold the centre in high regard. Staff have high praise for the headteacher; they enjoy working at the centre, feel valued and well supported. Skills have developed and talents come to the fore as staff have accepted new areas of responsibility and different roles, including that of Student Welfare Officer.
- The ongoing programme of support for new staff, and training and professional development for all staff, are closely linked to the priorities in the school's improvement plan and to the targets agreed with staff as part of their performance management. While clear about the kind of improvement expected, the improvement plan does not quantify the specific benefits expected for pupils' progress, achievement and personal development. As a result, leaders have few precise targets to enable them to gauge how effective their action has been. Staff value the regular training sessions, as well as opportunities to visit other schools and to discuss effective teaching strategies. This has led to much being incorporated into everyone's practice.
- There is growing pride that the centre is gaining a good reputation for its guidance on effective behaviour management and the sessions of counselling for pupils offered to mainstream schools. Other providers are now coming to the centre to see how staff manage pupils' behaviour. The recent creation of the rapid response team to tackle behaviour issues swiftly is proving to be highly effective. The work of the team ensures lessons continue with minimal disruption and also minimises risk for pupils and staff.
- The centre is meticulous in ensuring that the documentation and procedures related to safeguarding are complete and up to date. Leaders place high emphasis on pupils' safety and are quick to contact and work with other agencies when there is cause for concern. Such assiduous attention has ensured a rise in pupils' attendance and suitable placements elsewhere for pupils with particular needs.
- The strong emphasis on developing pupils' skills in getting on with others threads through all daily activities. Staff promote British fundamental values well; tolerance, fairness, justice and the rights of the individual are evident in how they deal with pupils and expect them to deal with each other. Effective counselling, group sessions and outdoor experiences are an integral part of the good provision for pupils' social, moral, emotional and cultural development.
- Subject leaders continue to improve the quality of provision and pupils' attainment. Changes this year in the courses taught, in the setting of homework and the provision of activities at the end of the day, have strengthened the curriculum, which is now good. They also reflect leaders' intention that all pupils should be able to take five GCSE subjects. Although the centre does not take responsibility for teaching music or a modern foreign language, it holds focus days throughout the year to give pupils related experiences and alert them to other cultures. It also provides many valuable outdoor learning and work experiences, linking with other agencies. For primary pupils, funding from the sport premium supports activities such as horse riding. Overall, the centre prepares pupils well for the next phase of their life, be that in mainstream schools, colleges or employment.
- The centre has developed an effective 12-week programme to tackle pupils' emotional and behavioural needs. It has gained much support from local schools in referring a pupil to the centre before permanent exclusion. By asking schools to collate a full profile of academic and pastoral information, staff are able to compile a programme to meet each individual needs from day one at the centre.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to boost pupils' self-esteem through one-to-one support, counselling and coaching. The tailored support, the good liaison with schools, the length of the programme and productive links with families and other agencies, all contribute to the increasing success of the centre in reintegrating pupils to mainstream schools.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance has improved markedly to being high quality. New members of the management committee have brought specialist knowledge and expertise and have added to the rigour of holding leaders to full account.
 - The committee gathers its own evidence of the impact of teaching on learning and has an informed overview of how different groups of pupils achieve. They evaluate closely the impact of the use of different funding streams on pupils' progress and achievement.

- The committee ensures that all statutory requirements are met and is thorough in all matters related to pupils' welfare.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

is good

- Teachers' expectations of pupils' learning have risen as the effectiveness of the management of pupils' behaviour has strengthened. Staff have sought and acted on advice and also drawn on effective practice at the centre and in other schools to iron out inconsistencies in how they implement agreed teaching policies and procedures. Good examples are the much-improved use of questions to probe and check pupils' understanding, the use of 'pink box' challenges to deepen pupils' learning, the increase in pupils' writing and the insistence on pupils setting out their work neatly.
- Teaching and support staff work very effectively together to ensure a positive learning atmosphere. Classrooms have displays of relevant vocabulary and information and teachers use a good range of materials and strategies to gain and maintain pupils' interest, including video clips, photographs and quick challenges. Pupils' learning is good when teachers revise previous learning and remind pupils of what they already know. When they gradually introduce and reinforce new vocabulary, concepts and procedures, pupils grasp ideas well and know exactly what they are to do.
- All staff use praise well to highlight desired behaviour and to sustain pupils' engagement. Support staff are particularly skilful in using positive comments to coax and cajole pupils as well as to deflect and defuse incidents when individuals are at risk of losing self-control.
- Since the inspection in December 2013, staff have become increasingly adept in assessing and keeping track of each pupil's progress across the curriculum. They now use this information well to set targets for each pupil and also to plan learning activities that meet pupils' differing needs. Some but not all pupils have a good picture of their progress and what they need to do next because staff remind them of their targets, and encourage them to decide for themselves how well they have carried out the given task. However, this is not the case for all.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The centre's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Over the last three terms particularly, the quality of pastoral care and support has strengthened and several aspects are exemplary. Staff know each pupil very well and understand the problems many pupils face in and out of the centre. They work cooperatively and continuously to reduce pupils' anxieties and concerns, and to counsel and guide pupils in how to stay safe, including sexual health and mental well-being. Staff are quick to follow up concerns and to contact families and other agencies when safeguarding or welfare issues arise.
- Personal, social and health education is an integral part of the curriculum. Staff reinforce and praise good manners and pupils gain up-to-date knowledge from specialists on issues including grooming, e-safety and the dangers of stereotyping. Pupils know that bullying in any form is unacceptable. One commented that all know to stay safe in the centre by using avoidance strategies.
- The meeting of staff and all pupils over breakfast provides a relaxed, purposeful and social start to the day, reinforced by timely reminders about expectations of pupils' conduct in and around the centre.
- Pupils comment that they enjoy being at the centre. They grow in confidence and know that they 'do better' because of the support and encouragement of all staff. Older pupils talk of now wanting to do well in examinations to ensure that they get a place at college or the job they want. Year 11 pupils are voluntarily staying at the end of the day for extra support in doing homework or extra teaching sessions. This is a first for the centre.
- Members of the School Council play a key part in voicing ideas for change, alerting all pupils to available activities in the centre and the local area, and organising fundraising events.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good given that many have been identified as behaving unacceptably in mainstream schools.
- The centre has records showing remarkable changes in individuals' behaviour over a relatively short period of time. Pupils who have settled at the centre are generally polite, respectful and helpful. They cooperate, concentrate and apply themselves maturely and sensibly to the task in hand.

- Occasionally, pupils, most usually those new to the centre, ignore instructions and requests, interrupt by shouting out and lose self-control. Logs show, however, that the frequency and severity of such incidents have decreased over the last two years. This is in large part due to the effectiveness of the pastoral team in helping pupils to manage their anger and to recognise the consequences of their behaviour. Counselling and one-to-one guidance, especially in discussing possible routes into training, education or employment, have proved highly effective in helping older pupils to decide what path to take.
- A typical remark of 'I didn't want to come to the centre but now I don't miss a day' is echoed in the fact that six pupils have not had a day's absence since they came to the centre. Several former non- or low-attenders have attendance rates above 60% and the centre is close to meeting its target of 90%.
- Pupils' pride in their work and respect for the centre's rules show in the total absence of damage to displays on walls, work books and equipment.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Outcomes are improving because of the good quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and the strengthening emphasis on academic progress now that the effective systems to manage pupils' behaviour are well embedded.
- Achievement is closely related to pupils' self-confidence and well-being and there are no significant differences between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others. On first arriving at the centre, pupils of all ages and abilities often make minimal or sporadic progress in lessons as they vie for attention or try to impress others. Once they settle and accept that all staff expect them to abide by the rules and to learn, they generally make good progress. For some, progress is rapid given their starting points, which may be a year or more behind for their age. The centre's information, gained from half-termly assessments of each pupil's attainment and progress, shows that some pupils make a year's progress in a term, particularly in writing, spelling and in mathematics.
- In 2015, one third of those leaving Year 11 had made the progress expected nationally at Key Stages 3 and 4. For many of them, this progress was uneven but accelerated when they came to the centre, especially in Key Stage 4. All Year 11 pupils gained at least one GCSE or its equivalent, 70% gained at least one Grade C and all went on to further education, apprenticeships or employment.
- The positive impact of an emphasis on writing skills is visible in pupils' growing willingness to write lengthy narratives, diary entries and poems drawing on language for effect. Examples are the good-quality work by Key Stage 2 pupils on the role of air raid wardens in the Second World War and the poignant group poem compiled by Key Stage 4 pupils to commemorate Remembrance Day.
- The presentation of pupils' work is now of a high standard. The use of books for all work and a common push to emphasise neat working and legible handwriting, have resulted in pupils taking care in what they do. For example, in mathematics, there are now fewer errors due to the incorrect alignment of computations. Pupils are increasingly responding to the challenges posed by teachers in 'pink box marking' by adding further information or answering questions.
- Progress in reading is less consistent. Although pupils' interest in reading increases, helped by daily sessions reading online or with others, including local rugby players, pupils' skills are not as strong in reading between the lines or in giving their ideas about what the text might mean. Hence, pupils often need help to interpret the meaning fully. Now that more pupils are enjoying reading, the centre has rightly identified the need to place more emphasis on developing the skills of comprehension through adult-led sessions of guided reading.
- In science and the humanities, pupils' progress is often uneven because of the need to catch up on missed practical experiences in mainstream school, especially in physics, chemistry and geography. Although their knowledge base improves, pupils are slower to gain the skills needed to make rapid progress in practical science. Pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 are starting to show competence in planning investigations, hypothesising and coming to conclusions.

School details

Unique reference number	112096
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10001586

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Maintained pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	44
Appropriate authority	Management committee
Chair	Michael Priestley
Headteacher	Helen Johnson
Telephone number	01946 834848
Website	www.westcumbrialearningcentre.co.uk
Email address	pru.west@cumbria.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	December 2013

Information about this school

- The centre is the pupil referral unit for the west of Cumbria offering education to pupils in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 who are at risk of permanent exclusion from primary or secondary schools. It is also the base for the Hospital and Home Tuition Service, which provides up to five hours' support each week to pupils who are not attending school due to reasons other than exclusion, including illness (medical and psychological) and pregnancy.
- The centre offers outreach support to other schools through advice for staff and counselling for pupils.
- The number on roll at the centre varies significantly throughout the year, reflecting the short-term placement of many pupils who return to mainstream schools, and the longer-term placement of others. Since September 2015, 14 pupils have been placed on roll.
- At the time of the inspection, there were four Key Stage 2 pupils, 11 Key Stage 3 and 17 Key Stage 4 pupils, mainly male, who were either at risk of exclusion or had been excluded from their mainstream schools. Most were attending full time. Nine pupils, mainly in Key Stage 2 and Year 10, were attending part time at the centre and part time at mainstream schools. Four Year 11 pupils were taking part in a pilot programme, taking vocational courses at the West Cumbria Action Zone and taking other subjects at the centre. Twelve pupils, mainly girls, were receiving support either at home, in hospital or at various places including the base at the centre.
- The pupils are White British. None speaks English as an additional language. All are identified as having special educational needs.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- When the centre was inspected in December 2013 it was judged to require special measures. Inspectors carried out five monitoring inspections and judged the centre to be making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.
- The headteacher took up her position in April 2014.
- Two teachers joined the centre in September 2015.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of teaching and learning sessions. Three observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors spoke informally to pupils at breaktimes and in sessions, and met with members of the School Council, covering a range of issues but particularly about their progress, their learning in lessons, their views about the centre and their safety while there. The responses of four Key Stage 3 pupils to the online questionnaire were also considered.
- Inspectors met with one parent, contacted four others by telephone to hear their views about the centre, and took into account the views expressed in a letter from a parent and a pupil, as well as the 16 responses to the school's questionnaire issued at a meeting for parents in November 2015. There were insufficient responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) to inform the inspection findings.
- An inspector met with all support staff to hear their views. Inspectors also took into account the responses from 11 staff to the online questionnaire.
- An inspector met with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Management Committee, and also with a representative from the local authority.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, senior leaders including the Business Development Manager, and other staff, including the science specialist teacher, who was not teaching due to illness.
- The inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents including the school self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, records of pupils' progress and attainment, curriculum planning and samples of pupils' work across the curriculum.

Inspection team

Sonja Øyen, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Linda Griffiths	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2015

