

Cumberland School

Church Road, Bamber Bridge, Preston, Lancashire PR5 6EP

Inspection dates

26–28 June 2018

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	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders, managers, directors and staff have maintained outstanding provision at the Bridge campus. Provision at the new Beacon campus is good and rapidly improving.
- Leaders inspire staff to go about their work with absolute determination and often with high expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Many pupils in the school have large gaps in their education. Once they settle into the school's nurturing, positive and safe environment, they re-engage with learning and make good progress from their starting points.
- The curriculum is rich and varied. It balances well the strong emphasis on developing pupils' literacy skills with a wealth of other opportunities. Pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is good.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They are well-informed about how to keep safe in different situations.
- The behaviour of pupils is good. Challenging behaviour is well managed by staff.
- The school provides outstanding pastoral care. The internal team around the child (ITAC) strategy is highly effective in supporting individual pupils
- Senior leaders have a strong and accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning and personal development.
- The school is very supported by the Witherslack group. The directors all have an excellent understanding of the school's achievements and planned future developments.
- The majority of teaching is lively, tailored to pupils' needs and sometimes inspirational. Just occasionally there is not enough challenge to promote rapid learning.
- Rates of attendance are below average. For some pupils this is a barrier to achievement.
- Proprietors, senior leaders and staff have all ensured that the independent standards are met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes for pupils by:
 - ensuring that learning activities consistently stretch and challenge pupils of all abilities so that they make strong progress
 - continuing the drive to improve attendance by working more closely with parents and pupils to help them to understand the value of regular attendance.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Senior leaders and directors took the decision to split the school onto two sites. Bridge campus caters exclusively for pupils with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The new Beacon campus provides a purpose-built learning environment for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH). The school's excellent track record in helping such pupils to overcome their difficulties and achieve well has resulted in a waiting list for pupils to attend. The move will allow the school to accept more pupils.
- Honest and accurate evaluation of the school's effectiveness has identified that the move to the new site has slowed the rate of progress made by pupils at the Beacon campus. The initial settling-in period took longer than anticipated. Pupils were unsettled by different journeys to school, working in a new building and getting used to some new teachers. The vast majority of pupils join the school having had numerous school placement breakdowns and this further change affected some of them adversely. This was also a challenging time for staff as they settled into new surroundings in the middle of the academic year. Leaders addressed these issues by appointing additional staff and arranging for Year 11 pupils to take their examinations at the Bridge site, with which they were much more familiar. Progress is now increasing as staff and pupils become used to their new working environment.
- Leadership at all levels is ambitious, confident and inspiring. The executive headteacher spends time at both campuses and supports both heads of education. The leadership of all three is sensitive and determined. Leaders have created a caring yet challenging learning environment which recognises individual strengths and needs. This enables pupils to make strong progress and develop confidence and self-esteem.
- At the Bridge campus, the staff have shaped the curriculum even more closely to match the needs of ASD pupils and provide more therapeutic support. Progress is excellent for these pupils.
- The head of education at the Beacon campus, who is extremely well supported by the executive headteacher, is developing new ways to work with SEMH pupils. As a result of careful evaluation of what is needed, the school has increased the role of school counsellors and mental health practitioners and provided more support for pupils with speech and language difficulties. The impact of these changes is demonstrated by the increasingly rapid progress made by pupils.
- Middle leaders feel empowered to develop their departments. They have succeeded in changing many pupils' perceptions about learning. Reading is now seen by many as an enjoyable activity. Mathematics is no longer regarded as a 'hard' subject.
- Staff development has a high priority. There is excellent leadership of teaching and learning. There are many opportunities for professional development and the sharing of good practice across the Witherslack Group. This has increased the confidence and expertise of staff. Pupils' progress and behaviour management are both strong. The success of pupils is a key feature of all performance management arrangements.
- Both campuses have a resident special educational needs coordinator and a pastoral manager. Each pupil has an individualised education programme, supplemented where

necessary with a therapeutic programme responding to their needs. All pupils have a dedicated ITAC which establishes a supportive environment for each individual. Every pupil's progress and personal development is discussed weekly by the team. This is why pupils are making good, and sometimes excellent, progress. Pupils feel supported and understood.

- A senior leader oversees provision for pupils in the care of the local authority. The tracking of their attendance and progress shows that this group of pupils makes stronger progress and has higher attendance rates than other pupils.
- The curriculum is rich and varied. It is adapted very specifically to meet pupils' individual needs. Many pupils still require a primary school curriculum when they first join the school to make up for gaps in their learning. At key stage 4, pupils choose from a good range of GCSE options. Many vocational subjects are on offer, such as motor vehicle maintenance, construction, hair and beauty, catering, small animal management and fishing management. Impartial careers guidance is provided by staff on both sites at key stage 3 and 4 to enable pupils to make informed choices. All pupils progress to further training or education when they leave school.
- The curriculum underpins pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their awareness and understanding of British values. Their poster about British values includes a statement about the British sense of humour which 'means we can laugh at ourselves'. Pupils are very well aware of the evils of discrimination and the school does its utmost to promote equal opportunities. For example, in response to pupil requests, leaders have provided gender-neutral toilets. A recent 'faith day' enabled pupils to learn about different faiths across the world and was followed up by a visit to a mosque.
- Staff morale is very high. This was seen in the overwhelmingly positive response to the Ofsted staff questionnaire. Staff feel valued and very well supported. One comment summed this up for many, 'I enjoy the ethos of respect and dignity which permeates through the school.'
- Parents are very pleased with the school, which they see as having the best interests of their children at heart. Comments included: 'Staff work tirelessly' and 'Thanks to the continued hard work of Cumberland, we now dare to dream of our son's future.' A minority of parents expressed concern that sometimes work is not sufficiently challenging.

Governance

- The school is owned by the Witherslack Group. Governance is provided by the directors of the group. The directors led the decision to expand the school because of increasing numbers, by opening a second campus.
- The directors hold board meetings every half term to monitor what is happening and evaluate the quality of the school's provision. The regional director visits the school weekly. Consequently, they know the school well and how to improve it further.
- Members of the board have wide-ranging expertise in education, educational psychology, physiotherapy, and mental and occupational health, which enables them to provide excellent support.
- Directors oversee safeguarding arrangements, health and safety matters, pastoral care

and the quality of education. They hold school leaders to account and set them challenging targets. They ensure that all the independent school standards are met.

- The directors provide many opportunities for staff at all levels to observe and share good practice across their schools. This has enhanced the quality of teaching and learning across the organisation.
- Directors have invested in excellent resources on both campuses to support learning, therapy and care. For example, since the previous inspection, the Bridge campus has a well-equipped occupational therapy room. Both campuses have relaxation rooms where pupils who need some time out can sit to recover quietly. Both campuses have new outdoor gym and exercise equipment which is well used by pupils every day for relaxation, exercise and sheer enjoyment.
- Staff from the Witherslack Group often provide training for local authorities on aspects such as positive behaviour support and provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Record-keeping and the provision of a single central record are exemplary. The designated safeguarding lead provides regular training and updates for all staff.
- School leaders place a very strong emphasis on e-safety. Information technology staff conduct one-to-one sessions for pupils who leaders feel need extra support in understanding the dangers of misuse of social media.
- Pastoral teams are aware of the various challenging circumstances in which some pupils live. The teams support vulnerable pupils by providing whatever help is needed.
- Leaders on both campuses have good relationships with local agencies to make sure that they are aware of any local issues about safeguarding. Records relating to the safety of the building are exemplary and risk assessments are in place for all pupil activities. Both sites are exceptionally well maintained and secure.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Staff share the breakfast club with pupils. It is immediately followed by 'ready to learn' sessions with form tutors. These include reviews of personal targets, literacy work, relaxation therapy sessions and citizenship. This means that pupils are ready for the day ahead and in a mood to learn.
- Highly positive relationships encourage pupils to work hard, concentrate and respond to their teachers and teaching support staff. The small class sizes provide plenty of one-to-one support and personalised learning so that pupils make good, and sometimes outstanding, progress.
- Learning is often enhanced by well-chosen resources and made relevant to everyday life. For example, a mathematics lesson on coordinates was brought vividly alive when pupils looked at a live map of a nearby port to see the actual ships on the water that morning. In studying the war poets, pupils saw compelling video images of trench

warfare which enabled them to appreciate even more deeply the poignancy in the work of these poets.

- Pupils often exceed their own expectations of what they can achieve when working in practical subjects. This was evident in art lessons on both campuses, where pupils in key stage 3 were producing fine lino prints and creating striking willow lanterns.
- Practical experiments in science enable pupils to see chemical reactions for themselves and to make deductions. High levels of cooperation between pupils, teachers and teaching assistants give pupils confidence to experiment in other subjects such as information technology and design technology.
- Lesson planning is comprehensive and identifies all possible opportunities for literacy, numeracy and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This means that pupils make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the curriculum and gain deeper insight into abstract concepts. Phonics sessions for all pupils allow them to make up for lost ground and improve their reading skills.
- Teaching assistants play an important role in class teaching. They monitor behaviour, support learning, model positive attitudes, affirm success and help to maintain the pace of learning for pupils. This means that across the school all pupils make at least good progress.
- Teachers use ongoing assessment to check pupils' understanding so that they can adapt work to make sure that pupils make progress. Pupils learn how to assess their own work and that of their peers. All assessment outcomes are shared with pupils so that they know how well they are doing in reaching their targets.
- Most tasks are appropriately challenging, but this is not consistent across all subjects and both campuses. Sometimes work is too easy, so that pupils do not make such rapid progress. This is more often the case on the Beacon campus than at the Bridge.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Breakfast club provides a relaxed and sociable start to the working day. Entries in the 'Positive Comments Book' are read out to congratulate pupils who have been commended for their work or attitude on the previous day. Pupils also put comments in the book.
- Mutual respect and cooperation between staff and pupils contribute to the growing self-confidence and self-awareness of most pupils.
- Pupils on both sites affirm strongly that they are safe and know how to keep safe. Across the curriculum and in tutor times, pupils are taught how to keep safe in risky situations such as swimming in deep water, the danger of railway power lines and the hazards of abuse of drugs, alcohol and smoking.
- School records and discussions with pupils indicate that bullying is rare and is dealt with effectively when it occurs. Pupils commented that 'there's none really, you take time to get to know people'. Pupils are aware of all forms of prejudice-based bullying, including homophobic bullying, and understand that it is destructive and wrong. They have many

opportunities to understand the dangers of misuse of social media and ways of avoiding cyber bullying. They understand the importance of using privacy settings when using the internet.

- Pupils respect the staff: 'Teachers spend time making sure you really understand your work.' All pupils spoken to agreed that there is always an adult to talk to if they feel worried or anxious. The great majority of pupils are proud of their school: 'I wouldn't change a thing.'
- All pupils are set weekly targets around their behaviour, attitudes and attendance. Those who reach the target can select a Friday reward. Each week approximately 80% achieve their target. Pastoral teams are aiming to increase this to 90% in the next term.
- Pupils participate in many community events as well as special days in school such as gardening activities, Spanish day, visits to the local cenotaph and raising money for charities. This term staff and pupils at the Bridge celebrated the royal wedding with a garden party. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of British values. In citizenship lessons they have discussed Brexit and the last general election.
- The attendance, progress and safety of pupils attending vocational courses with alternative providers is thoroughly checked daily. Pupils successfully complete the courses and gain valuable qualifications.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Although the conduct and self-discipline of pupils reflect the strong models of adults, some behaviour is inconsistent. This is more the case at the Beacon site and reflects the recent relocation to a new building.
- Pupils report that some lessons are occasionally disrupted. Highly effective management strategies quickly minimise disruption, allowing lessons to continue undisturbed. All incidents are logged and show a good reduction in such incidents for individual pupils.
- The low attendance of some pupils is a barrier to learning and progress. Overall, it is below average and lower at the Beacon campus than the Bridge. The school works with parents to support attendance, but this is not always successful. Leaders use strategies such as first-day phone calls, home visits and personal attendance plans.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' starting points are often well below what might be expected for their age. Their previous learning has often been affected by poor attendance, behaviour issues, complex medical issues and emotional difficulties. Good teaching and excellent pastoral care helps them to overcome these barriers and make good and sometimes outstanding progress.
- By the end of Year 11, all pupils gain qualifications at GCSE foundation level. An increasing number achieve higher passes in English, mathematics and science. Outcomes vary slightly from year to year because the number of Year 11 pupils is small. Nevertheless, in the last four years all Year 11 pupils have gained at least one qualification and in 2017 93% achieved an A* to G grade in both English and mathematics.

- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 gain qualifications in a wide range of practical and vocational subjects such as food technology, construction awards, motor vehicle maintenance, media studies, hair and beauty and fisheries management.
- The proportion of pupils making or exceeding the progress expected by the school is increasing after stalling slightly last year on the Beacon campus. Assessment tracking data in the last two terms shows a good improvement and indicates that all pupils make good progress.
- The work in pupils' books and folders shows consistently good progress over time in all curriculum subjects. Books are well set out and show pupils' pride in their work.
- Pupils in the care of the local authority, about one third of the school, currently make stronger progress than other pupils. One reason for this is that they have better rates of attendance. Low attendance is recognised by the school as a key barrier to learning.
- The most able pupils receive one-to-one coaching to enable them to access higher-level courses and sometimes take GCSE examinations earlier in Year 10.
- Pupils' acquisition of core skills across the curriculum and their developing self-confidence enables them to access a wide range of courses. This prepares them well for the next stage of their education, training or employment. In the last three years, all pupils leaving Year 11 have gone on to further education, apprenticeships or employment. All pupils in the current Year 11 have been accepted onto their chosen courses.

School details

Unique reference number	135541
DfE registration number	888/6104
Inspection number	10048594

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	76
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group
Chair	Judith Jones
Headteacher	John Gilfillan
Annual fees (day pupils)	£49,947 to £85,266
Telephone number	01772 284435
Website	www.witherslackgroup.co.uk/cumberland-school
Email address	donna.rothwell@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	16–18 June 2015

Information about this school

- Cumberland School is a co-educational day school providing full-time education for 76 pupils. Since June 2017, the school has operated on two sites.
- Bridge campus is at Bamber Bridge, near Preston. It currently caters for 28 pupils who have autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and associated complex needs. Beacon campus is approximately 16 miles away at Rivington, Horwich. It caters for 48 pupils who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH). There are no post-16 pupils on the school roll at present.
- Each campus is managed on a day-to-day basis by a head of education. The executive headteacher has overall responsibility for both sites.

- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan (EHCP). Just over one third of current pupils are in the care of their local authorities.
- The school uses the services of four alternative provision centres to provide vocational education for individuals or small groups of pupils. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are currently attending vocational courses at BDS Hair and Beauty, WLTL construction, CAST North-west (fishing, small animal care and construction courses) and FIXIT, Wigan (motor mechanics). Pupils also have access to Witherslack Group's own vocational centre at Skelmersdale.
- The school is owned by the Witherslack Group, a national organisation which owns and runs 16 schools and 22 children's homes.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils learning in different curriculum areas on both campuses. Some of the observations of learning were conducted jointly with the executive headteacher. They looked at the work in pupils' books during lessons and in formal scrutiny sessions.
- They attended breakfast clubs, visited 'ready to learn' tutor sessions and spoke with pupils informally at breaks and lunchtimes. They met formally with groups of pupils on both sites and attended a meeting of the school council.
- Inspectors scrutinised all policies and procedures in order to establish the school's compliance with the independent school standards.
- Meetings were held with some of the directors of the Witherslack Group, senior and middle leaders, the safeguarding lead, the executive headteacher, both heads of education, the pastoral team and other members of staff.
- Inspectors considered the responses of the 17 parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. They also took account of an email which a former pupil took the trouble to send to the inspection team.
- They gained the views of staff from direct meetings and reviewing the 57 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire.
- The Department for Education also commissioned the inspection team to consider a material change request from the school to increase number of pupils on roll from 76 to 96. The team would recommend approval of the material change because the school has larger, well-resourced premises, the curriculum meets the needs of pupils and leaders and managers have ensured that all the independent standards are met.

Inspection team

Judith Straw, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

John Shutt

Ofsted Inspector

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Manchester
M1 2WD

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