

Solway Community Technology College

Liddell Street, Silloth, Wigton, Cumbria CA7 4DD

Inspection dates

18–19 June 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders are ambitious for staff and pupils. Since the previous inspection, leaders have secured considerable improvements in the school. Pupils now benefit from a good-quality education.
- There is a broad and academic curriculum that caters to pupils' individual needs and aspirations.
- Most pupils make good progress across a range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. Improvements in the quality of teaching mean that outcomes for pupils are improving rapidly.
- Some pupils in key stage 4 are not working at the high standards of which they are capable. This is because weaker teaching in the past has left them with gaps in their learning.
- Leaders know their school well. They check regularly on the impact of their actions.
- Leaders use additional funding effectively. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is improving strongly.
- A strengthened governing body supports and challenges leaders effectively.
- Pupils are well informed about their post-16 options. All pupils go on to further education, employment or training.
- Middle leadership is strong. Middle leaders play an important role in improving the quality of teaching. Senior leaders support middle leaders and hold them to account effectively.
- Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to plan learning that builds on pupils' prior learning and develops their understanding.
- Teachers know pupils well. Teaching ensures that those pupils who fall behind in their learning receive help to catch up.
- Teaching is effective at identifying the gaps in pupils' learning. Nonetheless, there are occasions when some pupils do not commit fully to improving their work.
- Staff ensure that vulnerable pupils and pupils with social and emotional needs receive carefully tailored and highly effective support.
- The high proportion of pupils who join the school partway through their secondary education settle well and make good progress.
- Staff provide pupils who struggle to attend school regularly with a range of appropriate support. Nonetheless, rates of absence remain above the national average.
- Pupils behave well and display positive attitudes to learning. They are courteous towards staff and each other.
- The school is a safe, calm and inclusive place for pupils, where they are cared for well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Reduce pupils' rates of absence further by ensuring that pupils and their families are clear about leaders' high expectations for attendance.
- Further improve pupils' progress in key stage 4 so that these pupils reach the standards of which they are capable by ensuring that:
 - teachers routinely identify and address the gaps in pupils' knowledge in those subjects where there has been weaker teaching in the past
 - pupils commit fully to improving their work and learning from their mistakes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have created a diverse and inclusive community that welcomes all pupils, irrespective of their social or emotional needs, disadvantage, SEND or vulnerability. Consequently, the proportion of pupils choosing to attend the school is increasing. For instance, over a fifth of current pupils joined the school partway through secondary education. Many of these pupils have had a less-than-positive experience at their previous school. As a result, some of these pupils have negative attitudes to learning and poor attendance when they arrive. However, the good-quality pastoral support that leaders have embedded since the previous inspection ensures that new arrivals settle quickly and typically achieve well. Pupils have high hopes for their futures.
- Leaders have high aspirations for pupils and staff. To this end, since the previous inspection, leaders have taken the actions necessary to provide pupils with a good-quality education. Leaders know their school well. Their plans to improve the school are accurate. They measure their success by checking regularly on pupils' progress and attainment. Outcomes for pupils are improving rapidly. Leaders have demonstrated that they have the skills necessary to improve outcomes for pupils further.
- Leaders at every level have embedded effective systems to check on the quality of teaching. Where necessary, individual teachers receive bespoke training. Much of this training is carefully tailored for individual staff and highly relevant to their subject specialism. The result of leaders' work to improve the quality of teaching is clear across the school in many subjects, including English, mathematics, science, geography and history.
- Senior leaders have established strong links with a variety of external partners, including several local schools and colleges. The school is now part of the Cumbria Futures Federation. Leaders have been keen to learn from recommendations from external partners. Leaders have successfully adapted and implemented systems that have proven to be effective in other schools. For example, through these partnerships, leaders make sure that teachers' assessment information is accurate. This has had a positive effect on the quality of teaching across the school.
- Staff morale is very high. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the school and the improvements that leaders have secured. All the staff who responded to Ofsted's staff survey are confident that the school has improved since the previous inspection. All staff are proud to work at the school. They feel that they are held to account diligently by leaders and supported well to improve their practice.
- Leaders have a sound and clear rationale for their curriculum design. The curriculum no longer places a limit on pupils' aspirations. Rather, it supports pupils to make good progress. Leaders have taken steps to overcome the challenges faced by a small secondary school. The curriculum offer includes a broad range of academic qualifications for pupils.
- Effective links with external partners mean that leaders can offer pupils an academic curriculum delivered by subject specialists. For example, pupils now benefit from subject-specialist teaching in history, geography, biology, chemistry and physics. Following changes to the curriculum at key stage 3, more pupils now choose to study a

humanity and a modern foreign language at key stage 4. Improvements in how the curriculum is implemented in science mean that almost all pupils in Year 10 are studying separate sciences. Where appropriate, leaders adapt the curriculum to allow pupils to study qualifications that meet their needs. This includes those pupils who attend alternative provision.

- Leaders have formed strong links with local primary schools. This is helping to support pupils as they move from primary to secondary school. Furthermore, middle leaders work with the local primary school to secure progress in pupils' learning. For instance, in history, some pupils learn about the civil rights movement in key stage 2. This provides them with important knowledge before they learn about Martin Luther King in key stage 3.
- Senior leaders have made changes to the way in which they use additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have clear targets and milestones in place. They check regularly that this funding is used to good effect. The differences between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally are diminishing. In 2018, a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieved standard and strong passes in their English and mathematics GCSE examinations.
- Leaders ensure that pupils with SEND are identified quickly. This is because leaders work effectively with these pupils' families and their previous schools. Pupils with SEND receive appropriate support. For example, some of these pupils benefit from extra help with their literacy skills. This is helping to improve this group of pupils' reading and spelling accuracy across the curriculum. Leaders ensure that teachers are kept well informed about the individual needs of pupils with SEND. The progress made by this group of pupils is improving securely.
- There are a range of activities to allow pupils to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. These opportunities exist within lessons and as part of other activities to enrich the curriculum. For instance, pupils regularly commit to raising money for several local and national charities. Pupils benefit from visits to different places of worship to support their spiritual development and their understanding of religions different from their own. Staff focus on helping pupils to be tolerant and upstanding members of their community. Consequently, pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders have established strong links with parents and carers. Overall, parents are highly positive about the school. The overwhelming majority of those who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, feel that they are kept well informed about their children's progress. Moreover, parents would recommend the school to others.

Governance of the school

- The governing body has changed considerably since the previous inspection. Members of the newly formed governing body bring a range of relevant knowledge and expertise to their roles.
- Following the formation of the new governing body, governors have been keen to do relevant training and to develop their practice further. Consequently, governors have an accurate and well-informed view of the strengths of the school, as well as those aspects that require further development.

- Members of the governing body challenge leaders about all aspects of the school's performance. They ask appropriate questions of senior leaders. For example, governors have challenged leaders regularly about pupils' rates of absence. Governors also check regularly on leaders' use of additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have good systems to check that adults who work at the school are suitable to do so. Staff benefit from regular safeguarding training. They understand the potential risks that pupils may face, including dangers outside the school, for example the possible risk of radicalisation and drug-related crime. Staff understand the procedures that they must follow if they have concerns about a pupil.
- Leaders' work with external agencies and parents is highly effective. Leaders have forged strong relationships with a range of external agencies. Staff take the time to get to know their pupils well. As a result, they provide effectively for pupils' well-being and safety.
- Staff ensure that vulnerable pupils and those pupils with social and emotional needs receive appropriate guidance and support. Leaders check that alternative providers have suitable safeguarding arrangements in place.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Since the previous inspection, leaders at every level have taken effective action to improve the quality of teaching. Overall, pupils benefit from teaching that is consistently good. Teaching is particularly strong in science, English, history, Spanish and physical education (PE).
- The quality of teaching in a very small minority of subjects is not as good. Where this is the case, senior leaders' actions have resulted in considerable improvements. Teachers have benefited from carefully tailored training, including opportunities for subject-specific support. As a result, weaker elements of teaching that inspectors identified at the previous inspection have reduced significantly.
- Teachers have forged supportive relationships with pupils. This supports pupils' positive attitudes to learning. Pupils are highly motivated. They complete activities set by their teachers with enthusiasm. Pupils are confident to ask staff for help if they get stuck.
- Teachers are skilled in identifying those pupils who are at risk of falling behind. This is especially the case for disadvantaged pupils. Teachers challenge pupils to improve and correct their work. However, some pupils do not commit fully to improving their work. Although many pupils are keen to improve their work and they rise to the challenge, some pupils choose not to follow the advice that they receive from their teachers.
- Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to plan learning that is sequenced well. As a result, pupils can build on their prior knowledge and develop their understanding. For example, in biology, pupils in Year 10 use their knowledge about hormones to respond to more complex questions about the menstrual cycle. Mostly, teachers set purposeful homework for pupils that helps them to consolidate their learning.

- Teachers use accurate assessment information to plan learning that matches pupils' needs. Teachers check that pupils' learning is secure before they move on. As a result, many pupils make good progress from their starting points. This is especially the case for boys and pupils with SEND. Nonetheless, in some subjects, pupils in key stage 4 have gaps in their learning because of weaker teaching in the past.
- Staff provide effective support for pupils with SEND. Teachers and teaching assistants receive comprehensive information about the needs of this group of pupils. This means that pupils with SEND receive appropriate help that allows them to catch up with their learning.
- Pupils with high prior attainment are increasingly being given opportunities to think deeply and respond to more complex questions. Consequently, the progress that this group of pupils make has improved considerably. This is especially the case in English, science, Spanish and history. However, in a small minority of subjects, there are occasions when pupils cannot grapple with more complex ideas as soon as they are ready.
- Most teachers ensure that pupils can develop their literacy skills. There is a clear focus on pupils' accuracy when using subject-specific vocabulary. This has resulted in improvements in pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar across the curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils appreciate the benefits that a close-knit school community offers. They demonstrate positive and mature attitudes to their learning. Pupils are articulate and polite. During learning, they ask questions confidently and listen politely to their teachers and their peers.
- Pupils, parents and staff share the view that pupils are safe in school. Pupils would recommend the school to a friend. They feel well cared for by staff. Through the citizenship curriculum, pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils learn about the dangers of radicalisation and knife crime. Pupils understand how to stay safe on the internet and about the potential negative effects of social media. All pupils receive first-aid training. Pupils in Year 7 learn about the potential dangers of coastal tides and playing near the sea.
- Pupils are confident that staff will deal with incidents of bullying effectively. Pupils explained to inspectors how the school is a tolerant and inclusive community. Neither pupils nor staff will tolerate any form of bullying. Consequently, incidents of bullying, including racist and homophobic bullying, are extremely rare. Pupils explained that they can be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Pupils are respectful of types of families that may be different from their own.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well and embedded across all aspects of the school. For example, pupils can visit places of worship, including Islamic mosques, Buddhist temples and Anglican churches.
- Pupils report that staff are approachable and considerate of pupils' emotional well-being. The services that provide pupils with support for their physical and mental health are wide ranging and meet pupils' needs well.

- Pupils benefit from a well-planned programme of careers education, information, advice and guidance. As a result, pupils have high expectations for their own futures and what they hope to achieve. Pupils in Years 9 and 10 explained to inspectors how they understood the qualifications required to pursue careers in marine biology, medicine and forensic psychology.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils behave well during learning. They show respect for their teachers and for each other.
- Around school, pupils are happy in the company of staff and their peers. At social times, pupils' conduct is respectable. The atmosphere around the school is calm and friendly.
- Rates of pupil absence remain higher than the national average. However, published attendance figures are affected considerably by the poor attendance of a small proportion of pupils. This is especially the case for pupils with SEND. Many pupils who join the school partway through the school year have poor rates of attendance. Staff provide effective support for pupils to improve their attendance. Moreover, staff check that those pupils who are absent from school catch up with their learning.
- Leaders check regularly that strategies to improve pupils' attendance are having a positive effect. Nonetheless, leaders have not made their high expectations about pupils' attendance clear to some pupils and their families.
- Strong pastoral support for the very small minority of pupils who struggle to manage their own behaviour has been effective. The proportion of pupils who are excluded from school has reduced year after year. There have been no permanent exclusions since the previous inspection.
- Leaders check regularly on the behaviour and attendance of those pupils who attend alternative provision. Leaders support those pupils who attend alternative provision to improve their attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Published GCSE results for pupils in 2018 show that while all pupils' attainment, including that of disadvantaged pupils, is rising, the school performed below national averages in terms of pupils' progress.
- Published GCSE information, however, does not paint the full picture about the progress made by pupils who left the school in 2018. This is, in part, due to the high proportion of pupils who joined the school partway through their secondary education. Many pupils joined the school during key stage 4. They have spent most of their secondary education in other schools. Many of these pupils settle well, improve their attendance and behaviour and make good progress in this school.
- Furthermore, some pupils who are included in the published progress information had not attended the school for two years prior to their GCSE examinations. Leaders acted in the best interests of these pupils by ensuring that they remained on the school roll for the remainder of their secondary education. They also ensured that these pupils were safe.

- In 2018, the overwhelming majority of pupils made progress that was in line with that of pupils nationally. These pupils achieved, on average, a grade higher in their GCSEs than their counterparts who left the year before. This shows the rapid and considerable improvements that leaders have secured in pupils' progress.
- Similarly, in 2018, the differences in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally diminished considerably. This is because leaders used additional funding effectively to provide appropriate pastoral support and address any gaps in the learning for this group of pupils.
- Pupils' attainment is also improving rapidly. For example, in most subjects, the proportion of pupils attaining standard and strong passes at GCSE increased in 2018. This was especially the case in English, mathematics and science. However, some key stage 4 pupils have gaps in their learning in some subjects because of weaker teaching in the past. Consequently, some pupils in key stage 4 are still not achieving the standards of which they are capable.
- Most of the pupils currently at the school make good progress from their starting points. This is due to the improvements that leaders have made to the quality of teaching. These improvements are replicated across the curriculum. They are especially apparent in English, science, Spanish, history and PE. This is because teachers in these subjects are highly skilled in routinely identifying and addressing the gaps in pupils' knowledge. Furthermore, teachers in these subjects insist that pupils use the help provided and commit to improving their work.
- Leaders' assessment information, supported by a scrutiny of pupils' work, shows that all groups of pupils are making better progress than they have done in the past. Boys and pupils with high prior attainment are now performing well across the curriculum. The progress made by pupils with SEND is also improving. This is because teachers are effective at identifying and addressing the gaps in pupils' knowledge.
- Leaders place a high emphasis on the importance of pupils reading regularly. Staff insist that pupils read from a book of their choice daily. This is recorded in pupils' reading records. Those pupils who struggle with their reading benefit from effective support from staff.
- Leaders are committed to ensuring that pupils benefit from a range of careers education, advice, information and guidance. Consequently, all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, move on to further education, employment or training. This includes the small number of pupils who attend alternative provision.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 112377 |
| Local authority | Cumbria |
| Inspection number | 10087839 |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary comprehensive |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 122 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | David Davidson |
| Headteacher | Judith Schafer |
| Telephone number | 01697 331234 |
| Website | www.solwayschool.co.uk/ |
| Email address | office@solway.cumbria.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 22–23 November 2016 |

Information about this school

- This school is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It has high levels of pupil mobility.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. No pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is higher than the national average.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision at the West Cumbria Learning Centre.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has joined the Cumbria Futures Federation. This is a hard federation with a local school.
- In September 2018, a new governing body was formed and a new chair of governors was appointed. There have been staffing changes at middle leadership level. New teachers have been appointed in history and science.

- The school has been receiving support from a national leader of education (NLE). A specialist leader of education has also been providing support in the English department.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning and scrutinised pupils' work across year groups and subjects. Inspectors spoke with pupils during social times and between lessons. They also spoke formally with two groups of pupils.
- Inspectors considered 20 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. This included written responses from parents using Ofsted's free-text facility. Inspectors also considered 26 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and two responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.
- The inspection team considered a wide variety of documentation. This included leaders' improvement plan, the school's own information about the progress of current pupils, pupil attendance information and documentation relating to safeguarding.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and with middle leaders. Inspectors also spoke with other members of the school staff. An inspector spoke on the telephone with an alternative provider used by the school.
- The lead inspector met with four members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative from the local authority and spoke on the telephone to an NLE who provides support to the school. The lead inspector also met with a representative from the National Association for the Teaching of English who is currently working with staff in the English department.

Inspection team

Emma Gregory, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Osama Abdul Rahim

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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