

Inspection of a good school: West Cumbria Learning Centre

Toll Bar, Distington, Workington, Cumbria CA14 4PJ

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 December 2021

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils join the school at different times during their primary and secondary education. Many pupils have had poor educational experiences prior to joining this school. Staff help most pupils to enjoy learning once again. Most pupils are happy. They appreciate the support that staff provide. Pupils attend school more frequently than they did in the past.

Most pupils behave well in lessons and during breaktimes. However, behaviour is not consistently well managed across the whole school. This disrupts learning from time to time. Pupils feel safe and well cared for. Bullying is not tolerated. It is dealt with swiftly and effectively should it occur.

Pupils benefit from activities to support their social and emotional development. For example, pupils enjoy exploring the neighbouring national park on foot, by bike and on water. Key stage 3 pupils recently embarked on a national award to care for the environment.

Teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve are high in the hospital and home tuition service. These pupils achieve well. This is not the case in the pupil referral unit, the alternative provision and in the specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The curriculum in these sections of the school does not meet pupils' individual needs well enough. Many pupils do not keep up with the curriculum that their peers are learning in mainstream schools.

Although older pupils achieve some useful qualifications, they do not develop a secure enough understanding of subjects in preparation for the curriculum post-16. Younger pupils do not achieve as highly as they should.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, they have an increasingly secure oversight of this school, which comprises a pupil referral unit, a hospital and home tuition service, an alternative vocational educational provision and a specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND. Leaders are taking some effective action to improve the different aspects of the school's provision.

The majority of pupils who attend the pupil referral unit, the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND and the alternative provision have struggled in their previous educational settings. Many have been temporarily or permanently excluded from mainstream schools. Staff successfully support pupils to improve their behaviour and attitudes to learning. The majority of pupils successfully return to their mainstream school or move on to further education, employment or training. In addition, pupils in key stage 4 gain some external accreditation and qualifications, which are useful for their next steps.

Despite these positive features, some pupils in the pupil referral unit, the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND and the alternative provision do not achieve as well as they should. Academically, some pupils do not keep up with their peers in mainstream schools. This is because the curriculums in these parts of the school do not fully meet pupils' learning needs. Leaders and teachers have not determined the important subject knowledge that pupils need to learn and by when. Also, some teachers have not had the training and support that they need to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively.

Conversely, pupils who attend the hospital and home tuition service follow the curriculum plans set out by their home school. These pupils continue to progress well through the curriculum. They keep up with their classmates back in their home school. Consequently, when they are ready to return to their home school, they do not have any significant gaps in their learning.

Leaders do not make sure that teachers receive sufficient information about new pupils joining the school. Added to this, leaders do not ensure that teachers' ongoing checks on where pupils are in their learning are fully effective. Teachers' checks do not give them the specific information that they need about gaps in pupils' learning, or their individual starting points. This means that, with the exception of the hospital and home tuition service, the curriculum across the school does not build well enough on what these pupils already know and can do.

Many pupils find reading difficult. Leaders do not have a fully effective phonics and early reading curriculum in place. Added to this, staff have not received sufficient training to enable them to close the gaps in pupils' phonics knowledge. This means that pupils do not catch up quickly enough, and some are ill prepared to access the wider curriculum.

Leaders are effective in identifying the SEND of the pupils in their care. Leaders work well with other professionals to access specialist advice when pupils have more complex needs. However, leaders do not adapt the delivery of the curriculum effectively enough

for pupils with SEND, and for those pupils in the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND. This hinders some pupils with SEND from making the progress that they should through the planned curriculum.

From their starting points, pupils' behaviour improves considerably over time. Far fewer pupils are being excluded from the West Cumbria Learning Centre than in the past. However, staff are not implementing the school's behaviour policies and procedures consistently well. This means that, while in the majority of lessons pupils are free to learn without distractions, this is not the case across the whole school.

All pupils take part in the school's personal development programme. For example, pupils are well informed about local employment and training opportunities. However, wider personal development experiences are not planned as well as they should be. Pupils do not benefit as well as they could from this programme.

Leaders and governors are cognisant of staff workload and well-being.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspectors agreed that early reading, art and design, mathematics, and design and technology may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff undertake frequent safeguarding training so that they understand their roles and responsibilities. Staff report and record all concerns in a timely way.

Leaders work well with external agencies to make sure that pupils and their families get the help and support that they need. Staff are trained to identify and support pupils who may experience peer-on-peer abuse.

Staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They make sure that pupils are aware of the particular risks in their local area, such as county lines gangs. Pupils are also taught how to stay safe when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' curriculum plans for pupils who attend the pupil referral unit, the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND and the alternative provision are not fully formed. This includes the curriculum for pupils' wider personal development. Leaders and teachers have not identified the important knowledge that they want pupils to learn and by when. This includes some pupils with SEND. Consequently, some pupils do not learn as well they should. Leaders should ensure that they develop curriculum plans that help pupils to catch up on missed learning and to keep up with their peers in

their mainstream schools. They should also ensure that staff are fully trained to develop and deliver the curriculum.

- Leaders do not ensure that teachers have the information that they need to establish what pupils know and can do. This means that teaching does not always build on what pupils have learned previously in their mainstream schools. Leaders should ensure that teachers design their ongoing checks more carefully to establish where pupils are in their learning. They should also furnish teachers with key information about pupils from their mainstream schools to identify pupils' starting points.
- Leaders have not ensured that the phonics and reading curriculums sufficiently meet pupils' needs. Added to this, staff have not had the training that they need to teach phonics and reading effectively enough. This means that those pupils who struggle to read do not catch up quickly. This hampers their success across the broader curriculum. Leaders should strengthen the reading curriculum and ensure that staff are suitably equipped to help pupils become proficient readers.
- Leaders' policies and procedures relating to the management of behaviour are not implemented consistently well by all staff. This means that some pupils' learning is disrupted. Leaders should ensure that staff follow the school's behaviour policies and procedures as intended.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in November 2015.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 112096 |
| Local authority | Cumbria |
| Inspection number | 10199570 |
| Type of school | Pupil referral unit |
| School category | Pupil referral unit |
| Age range of pupils | 7 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 65 |
| Appropriate authority | Local authority |
| Chair | Michael Priestley |
| Headteacher | Daniel Gee |
| Website | www.westcumbrialearningcentre.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 24 and 25 November 2015, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The current headteacher was appointed in January 2021.
- The vast majority of pupils have SEND. Most of these are social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has opened a second site in Whitehaven, Cumbria.
- The local authority places some pupils with EHC plans in the school's specially resourced provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs on a full-time, permanent basis. These pupils are in key stages 3 and 4.
- The school runs a hospital and home tuition service. This caters for pupils who are unable to attend mainstream education due to medical conditions.
- Most of the pupils at the school attend the pupil referral unit. These pupils are in key stages 2, 3 and 4. Most are registered on the roll of a mainstream school and this school. A substantial minority of pupils in this group are only on the roll of the West Cumbria Learning Centre.

- Since the previous inspection, governors have taken over the management of a local alternative provision. This offers a vocational educational pathway for key stage 4 pupils from the pupil referral unit, as well as pupils from local mainstream schools.
- The school makes use of one alternative education provider, in addition to that provided by the school.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection that the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- During the inspection, inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, middle leaders, class teachers and support staff. Inspectors spoke with representatives of the local authority. Inspectors also met with members of the school's management committee, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors spoke with headteachers from local mainstream schools that have placed pupils at this school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, including the free-text responses. Inspectors also spoke with some parents and carers by telephone. Inspectors reviewed the responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey. Inspectors also spoke to staff individually, or in small groups, during the inspection.
- Inspectors met with those responsible for safeguarding at the school. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation in relation to safeguarding. They spoke to staff, parents and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at the start of the day, during lessons and at playtimes. They spoke to pupils about bullying, behaviour and leaders' expectations of pupils' behaviour.
- As part of this inspection, inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, and design and technology. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject teachers, reviewed curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with pupils about their learning and reviewed samples of pupils' work.

Inspection team

Pippa Jackson Maitland, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Julie Bather

Ofsted Inspector

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