

Inspection of West Cumbria Learning Centre

Toll Bar, Distington, Workington, Cumbria CA14 4PJ

Inspection dates: 28 and 29 June 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils who arrive at this school have experienced long periods of disrupted education. They are welcomed by all staff. Pupils settle in well in the caring and supportive environment that leaders have established. Pupils feel safe and happy at this school.

Staff have raised their expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils receive the help that they need to improve and manage their own behaviour. They show respect for differences between each other. Any incidents of bullying are dealt with appropriately by staff. Pupils have trusted adults to turn to if they have any concerns or worries.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of trips, including outdoor and adventurous activities. These help them to develop their confidence and self-esteem. Pupils are encouraged to develop independence and are well supported to transition into adulthood. For example, pupils make trips on public transport and learn to cook for themselves.

Leaders' expectations for what pupils should achieve are high in the hospital and home tuition service. These pupils achieve well. Leaders have high expectations for pupils in the pupil referral unit, the alternative provision and in the specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (specially resourced provision). However, these expectations are not fully realised. This hinders how well pupils achieve in some subjects.

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

Many pupils have gaps in their learning as a result of disruptions to their education. This has led to many pupils missing out on important knowledge across a range of subjects. Leaders carry out careful checks when pupils join the school. This helps leaders to identify pupils' social, emotional and academic needs. Leaders provide pupils with timely specialist support when necessary.

Pupils who attend the hospital and home tuition service continue to follow the curriculum of their home school. Teachers support these pupils well so that they keep up with their classmates back in their home school. This helps these pupils to achieve well across a range of subjects. Consequently, when these pupils are ready to reintegrate into their home school, they do not have any significant gaps in their knowledge and skills.

Leaders are reviewing and refining the subject curriculums in the pupil referral unit, in the alternative provision and in the specially resourced provision. These subject curriculums are at different stages of development. In some subjects, leaders have set out the knowledge they want pupils to learn and the order in which this should be taught clearly. Pupils achieve well in these subjects. However, in other subjects, leaders are still in the process of finalising what they want pupils to know and when this new learning should be taught.

Most teachers have the subject knowledge to teach the curriculum content well. Nevertheless, in some subjects, teachers do not choose the most appropriate activities to enable pupils to learn the intended curriculum. This means that some pupils do not deepen their subject knowledge as well as they should.

Teachers use leaders' assessment systems well to check that pupils have learned and remembered what they have been taught.

Leaders have introduced a school-wide programme to improve pupils' reading. Leaders identify any gaps in pupils' reading knowledge quickly. Staff have benefited from appropriate training to deliver the early reading programme. The books that pupils read match the sounds that they know. Staff support those pupils who are struggling readers well. Leaders have invested in high-quality texts for all year groups. Increasingly, older pupils are supported to read more widely.

Leaders have improved their support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders identify the additional needs of pupils with SEND. Staff have received training to better meet these pupils' needs. Staff use the information that they receive to support the learning of pupils with SEND so that they can access the curriculum alongside their classmates. This helps these pupils to learn well overall.

Many pupils struggle to manage their emotions and their high levels of anxiety when they join the school. Leaders have created clear routines and improved behaviour management systems. Any behaviour issues are dealt with calmly and sensitively by skilled staff. This helps pupils to improve their behaviour and ensures that learning continues with minimal disruption.

Before joining this school, many pupils did not attend school regularly. Leaders work closely with pupils and their families to encourage pupils to come to school. This helps many pupils to improve their attendance during their time in the school. However, the absence rates for some pupils are still too high. Consequently, these pupils miss out on important learning.

Leaders ensure that pupils learn about intimate relationships and sex through the personal, social, health and economic education curriculum. Pupils regularly go for walks in the surrounding countryside. They enjoy horse riding. These activities also help pupils to improve their mental health and well-being. Pupils receive impartial careers advice and guidance, which enables them to make informed choices about their next steps. They appreciate the support that they receive to complete their college applications. Many pupils move on to well-matched destinations to study a range of academic and vocational subjects post-16.

Staff enjoy working in this school. They report that leaders take account of their workload and well-being. Members of the management committee know the school well and understand what needs to improve. They challenge and support leaders effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders know pupils well and are extremely vigilant. Staff receive regular up-to-date safeguarding training. They understand the procedures that they need to follow should they have any concerns about pupils' welfare and safety. Leaders are tenacious in following up on all concerns. They work closely with external agencies, including the police and the youth offending service, to support and protect pupils.

Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe, including when online. They are made aware of risks, such as knife crime and criminal exploitation.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, leaders are still in the process of defining what pupils should learn. This is hindering some pupils from learning as well as they could. In these subjects, leaders should ensure that they define the most important knowledge that pupils should learn and the order in which this should be taught. This will help pupils to develop their knowledge over time in these subjects.
- In some subjects, teachers do not choose the most appropriate activities to enable pupils to learn and remember the key knowledge. Consequently, some pupils are not achieving as well as they could in these areas of the curriculum. Leaders should ensure that teachers deliver subject curriculums well.
- Some pupils do not attend school as often as they should. Consequently, they miss valuable learning time, which has a negative impact on their achievement. Leaders should continue to work with these pupils and families to ensure that pupils attend school regularly.

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.

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

Unique reference number	112096
Local authority	Cumberland
Inspection number	10240116
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	77
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair of governing body	Michael Priestley
Headteacher	Daniel Gee
Website	https://westcumbrialearningcentre.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	8 and 9 December 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Many pupils have been permanently excluded or are at risk of exclusion from their mainstream schools. Some pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- The school operates from the main school site at Toll Bar, Distington, Workington, Cumbria CA14 4PJ. The school also operates from premises at Richmond House, Catherine Street, Whitehaven, Cumbria CA28 7QX.
- Most of the pupils at the school attend the pupil referral unit on the Workington site. These pupils are in key stages 2, 3 and 4. Most of these pupils are dual registered. These pupils are on the roll of a mainstream school and this school. A few pupils are single registered at this school.
- The school runs an alternative provision. This is located at the Whitehaven site. Some of the key stage 4 pupils attend this provision. School leaders do not make use of any other alternative provision.
- The school has a specially resourced provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. This specially resourced provision caters for pupils aged 11 to 16. The specially resourced provision is located at the Whitehaven site. These pupils have EHC plans. There are nine pupils on roll at this provision.

- The school also runs a hospital and home tuition service. This caters for pupils aged 11 to 16 who are unable to attend mainstream education due to medical conditions.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders, staff, members of the management committee and representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to many pupils about their experience of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of evidence, including leaders' self-evaluation document and improvement plans. They also reviewed minutes of the management committee meetings.
- Inspectors checked the school's safeguarding policies and procedures and the single central record. Inspectors met with leaders, staff and pupils to check the effectiveness of leaders' safeguarding arrangements.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, art and design, and science. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. An inspector observed pupils reading to familiar staff.
- Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects, including mathematics.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View and the responses to Ofsted's surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Ahmed Marikar, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Andy Cunningham

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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