

West Cumbria Learning Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112096
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	301384
Inspection date	9 May 2007
Reporting inspector	David Smith

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	40
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Simon Leyton
Headteacher	Mr John Graham
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2004
School address	Toll Bar Distington Workington Cumbria CA14 4PJ
Telephone number	01946 834848
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Age group	7–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The centre provides education and support for pupils who have emotional, social or behavioural difficulties. Some of the pupils spend a prolonged period of their education at the centre. Thirty pupils have been permanently excluded from school and are educated full-time and ten pupils share their time between the centre and their mainstream school. Four of the pupils are girls. The vast majority of the pupils are White British and nearly half are eligible for free schools meals. Ten pupils have a statement of special educational need.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The West Cumbria Learning Centre is not sufficiently effective in providing for an increasingly challenging group of pupils, many of whom spend too long at the centre. In accordance with Section 13 (3) of The Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances that it reasonably might be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' achievement, personal development, the curriculum for the older pupils and the involvement of the staff in the leadership of the centre. Consequently, the centre provides inadequate value for money.

Overall, the pupils' achievement is inadequate: it is good in Key Stage 2 where many pupils return to their mainstream schools. In Key Stage 4 however, a significant minority of pupils do not achieve as well as they should and they leave the centre with external accreditation that does not reflect their capability; this hampers their ability to become successful adults in the future. Most pupils make good progress in art and design, information and communication technology (ICT), and physical education.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are inadequate. Whilst most of the pupils enjoy attending the centre, reflected in the satisfactory attendance at Key Stages 2 and 3, incidents of unacceptable behaviour are rising and the number of fixed-term exclusions is increasing. Particularly in Key Stage 4, where attendance is declining, there are some disaffected pupils whose irresponsible behaviour, at times, places themselves and others at risk. Their poor behaviour and attendance adversely affect their achievement. Pupils have a fair understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles as shown by their involvement in a good range of physical activities. Many of the pupils are keen cross-country runners and the younger pupils enjoy swimming. Pupils make little contribution to the community or have a clear awareness of their social responsibilities.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. It is good at Key Stage 2 because lessons are well organised, the teaching is enthusiastic and effective use of assessment ensures that tasks are generally challenging. The best teaching instils pupils with the confidence and skills to return to mainstream schools. Despite training, the staff are unable to manage the exceptionally challenging behaviour of some of the older pupils, and this adversely affects the learning.

Although there are strengths at Key Stage 2, the curriculum is inadequate overall. This is because of the weaknesses in the science provision at Key Stage 3, due to difficulties in teacher recruitment, and the shortcomings at Key Stage 4, where the courses on offer fail to engage many of the pupils and behaviour deteriorates.

Pupils are provided with satisfactory care, guidance and support. Systems for safeguarding the pupils are in place and staff work hard, for example, to promote pupils' attendance. Leadership and management are adequate overall. The headteacher and deputy headteacher, with support from the chair of the management committee, have the skills to drive improvement forward. Their evaluation of the centre's strengths and weaknesses is largely accurate but the adverse impact of challenging behaviour on learning has been underestimated. However, assessment procedures and development planning have improved since the last inspection and more staff are becoming involved in setting the future direction for the centre. The centre has satisfactory capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure there is a motivating curriculum and challenging external accreditation for pupils at Key Stage 4.
- Improve the pupils' personal development to ensure that all have positive attitudes and behave well.
- Further increase the contribution of staff to the leadership of the centre.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

The pupils' achievement is inadequate overall.

Key Stage 2 pupils respond well to good teaching and achieve well. They make good progress in their literacy skills as they learn to listen and develop the confidence to answer questions. Pupils' reading skills quickly improve and they extend the quantity and quality of their writing. They enjoy the opportunity to take part in practical work that helps them, for example, to make good progress in their numeracy skills. Pupils develop good ICT skills and use these to extend their work in other subjects. They meet most of their challenging individual targets and are made aware of how to improve their work. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those that are eligible for free school meals make the same progress as their peers.

The achievement of Key Stage 3 pupils is satisfactory. Some pupils make rapid progress when provided with intensive individual support. Pupils cooperate well with each other and share resources. They make good use of ICT to extend their learning in other subjects. Some of the pupils at both Key Stages 2 and 3 make sufficient progress in their learning and personal development to return to a mainstream school.

The achievement of a significant minority of Key Stage 4 pupils is inadequate. However, a few do make adequate progress and achieve success in GCSE courses and vocational courses. They also enjoy taking part and pass the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award. The vast majority of pupils spend the two years of this key stage in the centre and aspirations for their achievement are too low. Staff do not set challenging targets for pupils' success in externally accredited courses and some pupils become increasingly disaffected, fail to attend and exhibit unacceptable behaviour and consequently underachieve. The curriculum activities fail to motivate them and many pupils show little commitment to the courses in the centre or those provided in the community.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 4

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are inadequate. Pupils' unacceptable behaviour is reflected in the rising number of fixed-term exclusions. Some of the incidents leading to exclusion, particularly by pupils in Key Stage 4, have been very serious and demonstrate that some pupils show insufficient regard for their own or others' safety. Parents agree that their children enjoy attending the centre and, as a result, attendance is satisfactory and improving. However, the disaffection of some of the older pupils is illustrated by the declining attendance in Key Stage 4 and this contributes to their inadequate achievement. The attendance and behaviour of the younger pupils are good and many of them successfully return to a mainstream school. However, a significant minority of pupils spend too long in the centre. This limits their readiness for a return to mainstream

education or their behaviour deteriorates and they become increasingly disaffected. Consequently, as they progress through the centre, pupils are not sufficiently prepared to become successful adults. A significant minority do not develop an awareness of their social responsibilities, and their involvement in centre activities is low. However, whilst at the centre a majority of the pupils take a full and active part in a good range of physical activity and enjoy a healthy diet. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their training and involvement in cross-country events with other schools.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Support by the teaching assistants for specific pupils helps them to make satisfactory progress in their literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils are keen to answer questions and become more confident in their understanding and use of language that is specific to each subject. The quality of teaching and learning is good for the pupils in Key Stage 2. Teaching is confident, brisk and purposeful. The effective use of improved assessment procedures ensures that all pupils are challenged to make good progress in their learning. Pupils state that they enjoy work that is very difficult and they have a positive approach to their learning. Their work is marked thoroughly and they are made fully aware of how to improve. An interactive whiteboard is used well to motivate pupils and ensure that they are aware of expectations. The staff are unable to manage the behaviour of a significant minority of pupils in Key Stage 4 and, consequently, these pupils make inadequate progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

Although there are strengths in the curriculum, it is inadequate overall because of the weaknesses in science provision at Key Stage 3 and the shortcomings in Key Stage 4.

The curriculum for the younger pupils is good. The teachers ensure that the curriculum is kept up-to-date and prepares pupils effectively for their return to mainstream schools. Their learning is enriched by the use of a good range of resources and use of the locality for educational visits. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their weekly swimming session and become more confident in the water. The centre is an attractive learning environment and the displays reflect the high quality of pupils' artwork. The curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is adequate although, due to the challenge of recruiting staff, there are limitations in the teaching of science. There are significant weaknesses in the curriculum for the Key Stage 4 pupils and the courses on offer fail to engage many of the pupils. Pupils' behaviour limits their access to some of the more exciting aspects of their curriculum. For example, during the inspection two visiting fire officers were unwilling to put up with the pupils' extreme behaviour during their lecture on safety. Also, many pupils are not motivated by the courses provided in the community and opportunities are lost for them to gain meaningful external accreditation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Systems for safeguarding, child protection and health and safety are firmly in place and consistently observed by staff. Advice on staying safe and the promotion of healthy lifestyles are clearly displayed in the centre. The headteacher is

pleased with the impact of the concerted drive to stop pupils smoking whilst in the centre's care. Pupils' achievement is recognised and celebrated in the displays and during centre meetings. The process for settling pupils into the centre is effective; a parent commented that for their child, 'the centre was a very positive experience from day one.' The strong focus on improving pupils' attendance is having a positive impact on overall attendance at the centre. Despite staff training and regular meetings to help promote positive behaviour, the incidence of fixed-term exclusions has increased. Improved assessment systems are used to inform adequate educational guidance and this is particularly successful in helping to manage the transition of the pupils that return to mainstream schools. The centre has positive links with other agencies, for example, to help provide the work placements that most pupils find beneficial.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have the necessary skills and are determined to drive forward the improvements required. They are supported by the management committee, particularly the chair, who knows the centre well. There is a good understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses: self-evaluation accurately pinpoints barriers to meeting the needs of the pupils with increasingly challenging behaviour but the adverse impact on learning has been underestimated. Strategic planning has improved since the last inspection, though the number of priorities has been unmanageable, which has led to progress on a broad front rather than working towards sharply focused priorities. Increasing staff involvement in decision-making and in taking responsibility for improvement are moves in the right direction. The centre has the capacity to improve.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	4
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	4
The behaviour of learners	4
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	4
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	4
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

10 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of West Cumbria Learning Centre, Cumbria, CA14 4PJ

I enjoyed my recent visit to the centre. I am sure you are proud of the displays of your work around the centre and, in particular, your artwork looks very attractive. Also, it was clear that many of you are keen and talented cross-country runners. During the day, I had the opportunity to look at you work and visit the classes. Much of what I saw was pleasing but a few issues stood out.

Most of you enjoy attending the centre and, as a result, your attendance is satisfactory. The teaching I saw in Key Stage 2 was good and this encourages you to make good progress and helps many of you to return to mainstream schools. Those of you in Key Stage 3 make satisfactory progress, particularly when you are given additional help. Some pupils in Key Stage 4 have clear successes, for example, by passing their GCSEs and gaining the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme Bronze Award.

However, too many older pupils do not use your skills and abilities to the full and are not making enough progress. Your attendance slips and you show little interest in the courses provided in the school and the local community. Many of you spend too long at the centre and you become disinterested in your education. The negative attitudes and behaviour of some of you lead to an excessive number of exclusions and valuable learning time is lost. The staff are considering ways of encouraging good behaviour.

I have asked the headteacher and deputy headteacher to ensure that, along with all of the staff, they concentrate on putting these issues right. I am sure they would appreciate your help and support. For example, with more positive attitudes and a concerted effort by the older pupils to make sure that you do your very best, work hard and leave with a good range of valuable qualifications.

Yours sincerely

David Smith

Lead inspector