

West Cumbria Learning Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112096
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	319272
Inspection date	23 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Alastair Younger

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	48
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mr John Graham
Date of previous school inspection	9 May 2007
School address	Toll Bar Distington Workington Cumbria CA14 4PJ
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Age group	7–16
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. West Cumbria Learning Centre was last inspected in May 2007 when it was served with a Notice to Improve because it was performing significantly less well than might reasonably be expected.

Description of the school

This is a small pupil referral unit (PRU) serving a very large geographical area. Most of the pupils have been permanently excluded from other schools. A few remain on the roll of their mainstream schools but are at risk of exclusion. Boys significantly outnumber girls. Fourteen pupils have statements of special educational need. Most pupils come from families experiencing a greater than average degree of social and economic deprivation. Nearly all pupils are White British. Three are looked after by the local authority (LA).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this PRU requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the PRU are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Priorities for action identified at the time of the last inspection have not been tackled with sufficient urgency and progress has been too slow in making the necessary improvements. Furthermore, pupils' behaviour has deteriorated and absence has risen dramatically.

Achievement is not good enough. Many older pupils make very little progress because they do not attend with sufficient regularity. Attendance over the past year has been only marginally over 50% and is deteriorating. The quality of teaching is inadequate overall because it is not leading to sustained, systematic learning for the majority of pupils. Six Year 11 pupils leave this year, none of them with any formal qualifications. This considerably reduces their future prospects. On the brighter side, Key Stage 2 pupils attend well, are well taught and often make enough progress to return successfully to school.

On the day of the inspection most pupils who chose to attend behaved well. However, there are many serious incidents on record and over the past year there have been 75 exclusions and 68 instances when positive physical intervention has been needed. On too many occasions, the irrational and impulsive actions of pupils impact on the safety of themselves and others. Although the timetable includes a suitably balanced range of subjects, the curriculum is inadequate. It does not contribute enough to encouraging pupils to engage in activities or to their enjoyment. Furthermore, the curriculum does not provide the statutory entitlement for about a third of pupils, who have statements of special educational need. Safeguarding and protection procedures are rigorously followed but assessment procedures are embryonic. They do not provide the PRU with the information it needs to check the progress of individuals in order to offer them effective educational support and guidance.

The PRU has had a turbulent year which has been compounded by significant staffing issues. A new management committee has recently been formed and has met once. However, it is too soon to measure the impact of the committee's role on the improvement of the unit. Senior managers have taken appropriate steps to resolve staffing issues involving competency and long-term absence, but the process has been arduous and has detracted from the core priorities for improvement. Combined with negligible subject leadership, this has resulted in leadership and management being inadequate and the capacity for further improvement has been significantly weakened.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels.
- Improve older pupils' achievement.
- Raise the level of attendance and improve pupils' behaviour.
- Ensure that pupils with statements of special educational need have access to their statutory entitlements.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Achievement is inadequate and standards are well below national expectations. The exception is found in Key Stage 2, where pupils achieve well. The unit is hard pressed to provide information about pupils' achievement or the standards they attain. It often receives very little information about new pupils' achievement in previous settings. To compensate for this, pupils are tested in a number of areas of learning soon after they arrive but there is little systematic follow-up to this testing, with the result that progress is hard to check. One crucially important measure of the lack of progress is that not one of the six Year 11 pupils who leave this year will do so with any qualifications. On average, these pupils have been on roll for two years. Poor attendance is a major factor in pupils' lack of progress. It means that many make nowhere near the progress of which they are capable.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 4

The personal development and well-being of pupils are inadequate, as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Although about a quarter of pupils attend frequently, almost a half are absent for most of the time made available for them to learn and develop desirable personal skills. The exception is in Key Stage 2, where attendance over the past year has broadly matched the national average. Absence has been a major factor in pupils not completing accredited courses and resulted in huge inefficiencies in pre-paid courses in other settings which are only attended spasmodically. The problem of pupils not attending has escalated rapidly over the past year. Behaviour falls well below expected standards. Too many pupils remain oblivious to the safety of themselves or others. Most behaved well on the day of the inspection but one serious incident was witnessed. Such incidents are not uncommon and they impact upon the safety of pupils and staff alike. Many pupils lead unhealthy lifestyles out of the unit but those who attend are happy to engage in physical activities and to eat sensibly. Many pupils, mainly boys, have achieved success in cross-country running and football. Pupils make little contribution to the unit or broader community and their reluctance to show commitment to courses that could improve their prospects in later life significantly reduces their chances of future success.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The overall quality of teaching and learning is inadequate because teachers do not give sufficient attention to addressing the individual needs of older pupils. The lack of systematic assessment procedures results in teachers not consistently providing pupils with work that challenges them without overwhelming them. Too much of the work pupils are presented with is related to the reinforcement of previous learning rather than the promotion of new learning. This reduces pupils' enjoyment of learning and their eagerness to attend.

It is remiss that work is not varied sufficiently in lessons, given that there are often equal numbers of staff and pupils. Lessons are frequently characterised by a preponderance of worksheet-based tasks rather than dynamic activity. Lesson planning is weak, frequently failing to identify what it is that pupils will be expected to learn. There is very little assessment or

analysis of the progress pupils have made as a result of teaching. On a more positive note, teaching assistants relate well to individual pupils and occasionally contribute more to pupils' learning than their teachers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The curriculum is inadequate because it fails to interest too many pupils and because it does not meet statutory requirements for pupils with statements of special educational need. Although there is a suitable focus on promoting basic skills and pupils are given opportunities to participate in an appropriate range of aesthetic, practical and physical activities, the way these are presented does not entice pupils to participate. Many activities over-emphasise reinforcement of previous areas of failure rather than introducing new, exciting and more relevant avenues of learning. A suitable range of externally accredited courses has been arranged. However, the importance of pupils' commitment to them has not been secured and this is reflected in the number of courses that have not been completed by pupils currently in Year 11. Older pupils are offered opportunities to prove themselves in the workplace and some of these placements have been successful. The Key Stage 2 curriculum is sufficiently different from the one pupils have rejected in primary school, but not too different to hinder their return to mainstream education when they are ready. About a third of all pupils have a statement of special educational need, which entitles them to access the full National Curriculum. Almost a half of them have been on roll for over two years, over which time none has received their statutory entitlement. This is a serious inadequacy. The local authority has no curriculum policy for the PRU which means that the parents of children referred to it do not know what their child's entitlement is. This is in breach of statutory requirements.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Although the pastoral care pupils receive is satisfactory, the educational support and guidance they are offered are not. This is because assessment procedures are in the earliest stages of development. The unit could present virtually no evidence of the checking of the progress of individual pupils and it is clear in teachers' planning of lessons that little attention is paid to pupils' prior achievement. A system has been devised whereby pupils play a part in self-assessment as they judge their observance of school rules at the end of each lesson. This is a good initiative which would be improved if all staff talked more frankly with pupils about why they agreed, or disagreed, with their views, rather than completing their own assessment after the event. Although safeguarding and protection procedures are correctly followed, there are times when the irrational behaviour of pupils puts others at risk. The unit works closely with parents and links with other professionals and agencies, such as the education welfare service, are strengthening. However, the impact of these relationships, for instance to improve attendance, has yet to be seen.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Leadership and management are inadequate. Leaders and managers at all levels have not tackled the areas of weakness identified at the last inspection with sufficient vigour or urgency. Consequently there has been no discernible impact on the quality of provision and pupils'

achievement. Indeed, the unit's effectiveness has deteriorated in terms of pupils' behaviour and attendance.

Senior managers have been under pressure over the past year to resolve staffing issues related to capability and long-term absence. Both have proved time consuming and although they appear to have been resolved, it is not clear with what effect. Subject leadership is weak. There is insufficient internal monitoring of the unit's performance at all levels with the result that its effectiveness goes unchecked other than by the local authority. The recent reconstitution of the management committee is a positive step. It has created a body more attuned to the desires of the local community as opposed to being heavily dominated by local authority personnel. The local authority remains the 'appropriate authority', with responsibility for meeting statutory requirements and it has not done this with regards to producing a curriculum policy; hence it has not ensured that pupils with statements of educational needs have received their entitlement to access the National Curriculum. Inadequacies of outcomes and provision mean that the PRU is not providing adequate value for money.

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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	4
How well learners enjoy their education	4
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	4
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?	4
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?	4

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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
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	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

24 June 2008

Dear Pupils,

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

My job is to visit units such as yours and I visited your centre the other day to see how you were getting on. A few of you may remember me coming.

I am writing to tell you what I found out on my visit. Most Key Stage 2 pupils are attending well and making progress. However, this is not the case for pupils in other years and, overall, you are not achieving as well as you should. It would be a shame if those of you in Year 10 left next year without qualifications. The centre has improved the range of courses available to you in Years 10 and 11 and some pupils in these years are now benefiting from work experience. You are also beginning to benefit from giving your views on how well you have kept the school rules in lessons. However, I think the centre could be better and because of this I have recommended that a closer eye than usual should be kept on what is going on. This means that another inspector will visit the centre from time to time to check on improvements. Some things need to be done to help you enjoy attending the unit. Teaching needs to be more exciting to encourage you to achieve more and the staff need to help you to make more progress with your work. The people in charge have to get you to attend more regularly and behave better.

At times, some of you are not helping when your behaviour is unpleasant. There is no need for it. I was much more impressed by those of you who made a lot of effort to behave well when some of you let the side down during my visit.

The message to you is to turn up, try to improve your behaviour and let it be known what you think would improve life in the unit.

All the best for the future.

Alastair Younger

Lead inspector