

## PROTECT - INSPECTION

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Mrs Shelagh Bainbridge  
Executive Headteacher  
West Cumbria Learning Centre  
Toll Bar  
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Cumbria  
CA14 4P

Dear Mrs Bainbridge

Special measures: monitoring inspection of West Cumbria Learning Centre

Following my visit to your centre on 3 and 4 December 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the centre became subject to special measures in June 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures - satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Eric Craven  
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of West Cumbria Learning Centre

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 03-04 December 2008

## Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, four teachers, a group of pupils, the chair of the management committee, and three representatives from the local authority (LA) and had a telephone conversation with the centre's school improvement partner.

## Context

Since the previous inspection in June 2008 the headteacher has left the school and the deputy headteacher is absent. The LA appointed an executive headteacher from September 2008 to head-up the leadership and management of all three of its pupil referral units. Due to the absence of a senior leadership team the executive headteacher is currently acting as headteacher to the centre. The LA is to advertise for a new headteacher in January 2009. Two teachers were appointed earlier this term. There is a vacancy for a teacher to co-ordinate English. The membership of the management committee has been increased with some new members being senior leaders of local schools. There are 29 pupils on roll and 5 have statements of special education needs.

## Achievement and standards

No pupils gained external qualifications in the summer term 2008 because they either failed to turn up for examinations or did not complete their coursework. Since then the situation has improved. There are increased opportunities for pupils to gain external accreditations and a few have already gained 'ASDAN' awards. Encouragingly there are signs that pupils are more prepared to sit examinations and to complete required coursework. Those who have placements with providers of alternative vocational courses are attending more frequently and are in a better position to gain accreditation for the work they are doing.

It is difficult for the centre to judge the progress being made by pupils because only initial assessments have been made of the levels at which pupils are working in English, mathematics and science. Further regular assessments are planned and these will help staff track the progress made by the pupils and to judge whether this is at least satisfactory. The progress of pupils in the lessons observed was mixed. Those who responded to the teachers' requests and applied themselves to their work made at least satisfactory progress and some made good progress. In one of the lessons too much support was provided so that the pupils didn't get the chance to work independently and as a result the progress they made was restricted. In a couple of lessons there were a few pupils who made little or no progress because they were disengaged from some or all of the lesson.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2008:

- Improve older pupils' achievement - satisfactory.

### Personal development and well-being

A number of Year 11 pupils with very poor attendance and challenging behaviour left the centre at the end of the summer term 2008 and this has contributed to a better attendance rate overall and a more conducive learning atmosphere this term. Changes at the centre are also making their mark. The centre has liaised effectively with staff from the education welfare service and the attendance of the great majority of pupils has improved although the overall rate is still not at a level to be judged satisfactory. It has risen from 47% last year to a current rate of 70%.

In the lessons observed the behaviour of most of the pupils was broadly acceptable but from a few it was volatile, challenging and unsatisfactory. Pupils' attitudes to learning are not overly positive in the main. Too many simply comply, sometimes quite lethargically and offhandedly, with teachers' requests. The centre is at an early stage in gathering and analysing the data it has on pupils' behaviour and is not yet in a position to be definitive about improvements. Nevertheless, one indicator of a move forward is the reduction in the number of days of fixed-term exclusion. When comparing the same period in the autumn terms in 2007 and 2008 there were about half as many days lost in the most recent period. The centre has revised its management of behaviour strategy and rightly sees the consistent application of the strategy across the centre as its next task.

There was a mixed view of the centre given by pupils in discussions with the inspector. The older pupils were able to cite some positive changes, for example, to the curriculum and they felt that relationships with staff were better. Younger pupils found it difficult to say what they liked and were less convinced that things had improved. Interestingly, all the pupils spoken to would prefer to be in mainstream schools.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2008:

- Raise the level of attendance and improve pupils' behaviour – satisfactory

### Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is improving. An agreed lesson planning format and clear learning outcomes are used consistently. Moreover there are some outcomes for particular pupils in lesson plans although these tend to have a behaviour focus rather than being specific to the subject. The initial assessments in English, mathematics and science have begun to help teachers match work more closely to the needs of the pupils.

The features of the best lessons observed were: enthusiastic, lively teaching that encouraged an urgent pace; changes of activity so pupils had little chance to become bored; and questions from staff that encouraged pupils to think about their

answers and provide reasons for their responses. In the one lesson judged inadequate disruptive behaviour from one pupil in particular adversely affected the learning of another and drew him into the disruptive behaviour. Rules, consequences and rewards were not spelled out swiftly or firmly enough to the pupil to try and arrest his deteriorating behaviour, despite the fact that it transpired that he had not taken his medication that day.

In September 2008 the LA produced a curriculum statement for all of its pupil referral units and the centre has additionally produced its own curriculum policy. The centre provides a curriculum resembling the national curriculum but with a suitable focus for older pupils on vocational experiences and life beyond school more generally. External accreditation for courses is being actively sought by staff, for example, environmental and land-based science has been introduced as a GCSE course from September 2008. The centre has shortened the length of lessons and has increased the number of lessons of English, mathematics and science.

The executive headteacher has recently introduced a system of pastoral groupings where staff are key workers for certain pupils. The expectation is that staff will build relationships with parents, liaise with subject staff about the personal and social needs of their pupils and also liaise with relevant outside agencies. Although this system holds much promise it is too early to judge the difference it has made. From January 2009 the centre is planning to have individual learning plans for all pupils that contain behaviour, attendance and personal and social targets as well as strategies to achieve these. This is a much needed development. There is a small number of pupils who do not attend the centre and/or other placements full-time because they are in the process of building up their time at the centre. However, written plans and records of how and when they will increase their time are not in place.

Checks are made on the suitability of staff and these are recorded but the centre has not yet formed the single central record of the vetting information it is required to hold on school personnel. Risk assessments are commonplace but checks on these are not made frequently enough. Most staff have been trained in positive handling techniques although the two most recently appointed teachers are still to have this training. Worryingly, the centre's record of incidents of restraint, its 'restraint book', has been lost and a replacement is yet to be put in place.

The LA has identified a need in its statement of action to develop exit strategies for the small number of pupils with statements of special education needs so that, wherever possible, appropriate permanent placements can be found. Indeed, in Key Stage 2 one of these pupils already attends a mainstream school each afternoon and another is being prepared for a move to a secondary school. The LA has usefully provided guidance for staff in meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2008:

- Ensure that pupils with statements of special educational need have access to their statutory entitlements – satisfactory.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning – satisfactory.

## Leadership and management

Because the centre was at a very low base at the time of its last inspection the executive headteacher has necessarily focused her immediate efforts on improving and introducing systems to enable the centre to run smoothly on a day-to-day basis and on developing a positive atmosphere. She is having success on both these fronts. Firstly, assessments and pastoral support are helpful examples of some of the new systems. Alongside the systems, data is being marshalled so that staff can analyse it and check if the centre is having suitably positive effects on pupils' behaviour, attendance and achievement. However, because these systems are in their infancy and data is not yet plentiful there is little evidence to demonstrate the impact the centre is having. There are some broad indicators that it is going in the right direction. Secondly, the morale of staff has risen and there is evidence of staff working together as a team. They do not underestimate the challenges facing them and have a collective view that they can be successful. They value the work of the executive headteacher and the changes she has introduced. The learning environment has been made attractive with good displays and a range of suitable resources such as computers and interactive whiteboards. This contributes to a more up-beat atmosphere.

The centre's improvement plan was written before the arrival of the executive headteacher and before data had begun to become available. The executive headteacher recognises that this plan needs to be revised to include crisp, measurable outcomes for pupils as indicators of the success of the planned actions. It also needs to be shaped-up with the involvement of the management committee. A cycle of self-evaluation has been committed to paper so that all staff know what is being monitored and evaluated and when. In starting to implement this the executive headteacher has been well supported by the LA in undertaking lesson observations so that a view of the quality of teaching can be gained. Teachers have been given feedback following these observations but the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning as a whole across the centre have not been shared with staff and nor do they influence training plans.

The management committee benefits from wide ranging membership. New members have been added and notably these have included senior staff from primary, secondary and special schools. This adds strength to the strategic management of the centre and there are early signs of members using their educational experience to influence and support the work of the centre. The chair of the management committee has a clear view of the centre and its role in the LA's continuum of behaviour support.

The executive headteacher recognises there is still much to do to raise the standard of education to an acceptable level. Nevertheless a satisfactory start has been made.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2008:

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels – satisfactory.

### External support

When it was submitted to Ofsted the LA's statement of action was found to need revisions. These have been made and it now meets requirements. However, along with the centre's own improvement plan, the statement of action would benefit from more measures of pupil outcomes to determine its successes. Moreover, having these as a series of milestone targets would help the LA and centre know, at various stages over the life of the plans, if the actions are promoting sufficient improvement. Now that more data is available the LA has agreed to include these in its statement of action. The LA has met its statutory requirement to provide a curriculum statement for the centre.

The LA has supported the centre effectively in a variety of ways. Consultant support has been provided in mathematics, science, information and communication technology and special educational needs provision. There is some early evidence that this support is making a positive difference. For example, the recently appointed teacher of mathematics and science is building his confidence and skills and values the support he has received. The LA knows that support is required in English but has judiciously delayed this until a co-ordinator of English has been appointed so that its support has maximum impact. The centre's link school improvement officer is helpfully a member of the management committee and she has provided good support for the executive headteacher through her first term in the authority. The LA regularly monitors the progress the centre is making through its school specific monitoring group. This is chaired by the LA's principal school improvement officer and has wide and suitable membership to enable it to hold the centre and those working with it to account. A new school improvement partner has been allocated to the centre and has had only one meeting with the executive headteacher so it is too early to judge to effectiveness of this partnership.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Form a single central record of recruitment and vetting checks covering all employed staff and others identified by the school as having regular contact with children.
- Put in place a page numbered book to record incidents requiring restraint of pupils.
- Review the centre's improvement plan and include more measurable success criteria, principally around outcomes for pupils.
- Put in place individual plans to increase the attendance, at the centre or with alternative providers, of those pupils who do not currently access full-time education.