

# West Cumbria Learning Centre

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	112096
<b>Local Authority</b>	Cumbria
<b>Inspection number</b>	344695
<b>Inspection dates</b>	21–22 June 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Eric Craven HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	42
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Simon Leyton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss Lisa Balderstone
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	23 June 2008
<b>School address</b>	Toll Bar Distington Workington CA14 4PJ
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## Introduction

When the West Cumbria Learning Centre was last inspected in June 2008, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to provide an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. Subsequently, Her Majesty's Inspectors have made five visits to monitor the progress made by the centre.

This inspection was carried out at no notice by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector visited seven lessons and observed six teachers. Meetings were held with staff, pupils and representatives from the management committee and the local authority. The inspector observed the work of the pupil referral unit and looked at the centre's self-evaluation, planning, safeguarding documentation and records of the progress made by pupils. The inspector considered the responses made by parents and carers to questionnaires administered by the centre earlier in the term.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work and looked in detail at the following:

- the academic progress of the pupils
- the centre's efforts to improve the attendance of a small number of pupils whose attendance is proving very difficult to improve
- the behaviour of the pupils and how effectively staff manage this when it is troublesome
- the effectiveness of the centre's arrangements to keep the pupils safe.

## Information about the school

West Cumbria Learning Centre provides for pupils from the Allerdale and Copland regions of West Cumbria who have been or who are at risk of permanent exclusion from mainstream schools. Increasingly more pupils are attending the centre whilst still remaining on the roll of their mainstream school. Some of the older pupils have part of their schooling at other providers of vocational education including Lakes College and West Cumbria Achievement Zone. Almost all of the pupils are from White British families. A little over a third are known to be entitled to free school meals, four are looked after by the local authority and five have a statement of special educational needs. The centre was led by an executive headteacher for about a year after it was deemed to require special measures. The current headteacher took up her post in September 2009. The centre currently has a vacancy for a deputy headteacher.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?****3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****3**

## Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the centre no longer requires special measures. The centre now provides a satisfactory and improving standard of education.

The good work begun by the executive headteacher has been built on well by the current headteacher and the centre is now an effective learning environment. Staff work well as a team and have successfully grasped the nettle of school improvement and as a result, there have been strides forward in many aspects of the centre's work. These improvements indicate the centre's satisfactory capacity for further sustained improvement. Nonetheless, senior staff and the management committee do recognise that there is still more to do to ensure the pupils get the best possible education.

Although the quality of teaching has improved and is satisfactory overall, more needs to be good or better to eradicate past underachievement and to engage pupils in learning. The poor behaviour exhibited by many pupils at the time of the last inspection has largely subsided and learning is now the main focus for staff rather than the management of troublesome behaviour. This is because staff, for the most part, are consistent in applying the agreed procedures for managing behaviour and they have created an ethos for learning that pupils appreciate. This is not to say that pupils do not play up on occasion, but when behaviour does rear its head, staff almost always deal with it swiftly and effectively so that the learning of others is seldom disturbed.

Attendance remains very low and is compounded by a handful of pupils whose poor attendance is resistant to change, despite the rigorous efforts of the centre. The curriculum is satisfactory and has played its part in engaging the pupils who cite practical activities and off-site experiences as particularly enjoyable. As more pupils are remaining on the rolls of mainstream schools, staff are adjusting the curriculum to best serve those who receive their education in two places. Staff know the pupils very well and care for them highly effectively with teachers and teaching assistants working increasingly in harmony.

The headteacher has created a healthy climate where staff are playing their part in centre developments by being receptive to changes and taking on responsibilities. Because of all these positive developments the rate at which pupils are making progress is increasing as they apply themselves to learning and see the relevance of what they are taught. Increasingly they are reaching higher standards than in the past. They and their parents and carers say they feel safe at the centre and this reflects the rigour with which the good quality procedures for safeguarding pupils are applied. Other agencies and partners play important roles because of the complex needs of many of the pupils. The centre liaises well with its partners and increasingly so with parents and carers who

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recognise the improvements in their children's education.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the rate of attendance so that the centre's target of 85% by July 2011 is achieved, by:
  - working closely with other agencies to tackle the complex reasons why some pupils do not attend well
  - continuing to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum so that more pupils want to attend for more of the time.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is consistently good or better, by:
  - ensuring that pupils find lessons interesting and vibrant
  - providing challenges matched to the needs of different pupils
  - consistently planning for the work of teaching assistants.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**3**

Although a small number of pupils arrive with attainment around the national average, most start at the centre with attainment well below the levels expected because of previous disruptions to their education. Significant improvements at the centre are helping pupils close the gap between their attainment and that of others of the same age nationally. In 2009, 15 GCSE awards were achieved compared to none in 2008. Teachers' assessments show that many more GCSE awards are predicted in 2010 with about a dozen at grade C and above. This improvement is most notable in Year 10.

The rate at which pupils are progressing has increased. In Key Stage 2, it is best in English and mathematics with a few pupils making even more progress than is usually seen nationally. Progress in Key Stage 3 is better than in Key Stage 4 where the legacy of underachievement is most apparent. Progress is most evident in the practical subjects of food technology, science and design technology. Pupils with a statement of special educational needs do not miss out and they also make satisfactory progress. This is because the centre has been successful in ensuring that provision is matched as closely as possible to that specified in their statements.

Pupils' behaviour has improved considerably since the last inspection and the centre's measures of behaviour, including fixed-term exclusions, detentions and rewards confirm this. Pupils know right from wrong and are clear about what is expected of them. A system of restorative justice has been introduced which is helping them appreciate the effect of their actions on others and how they can make amends. In the main, they get on well together and antagonism is infrequent.

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Although attendance remains low, there are signs that the centre's efforts are making a difference. Over half of the pupils have improved their attendance over the summer term and a little over 60% have better attendance at the centre than at their previous schools.

Because of the efforts of staff to show them the perils of living unhealthily and unsafely pupils do understand the threats to a healthy lifestyle. However, not all of them apply this knowledge well. Pupils make a sound contribution to the centre and are increasingly seeing it in a positive light. A student council has been introduced and pupils talk about how they have influenced the arrangements for detentions and have raised funds for those in need. Vocational as well as academic courses of study equip the pupils for life after school effectively. The support of Connexions is valued in preparing them for and seeing them through this transition period. The centre is achieving its aim that all pupils leave with some form of qualification that is seen as a tangible asset in the world of work or further education.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	4
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>3</b>

## How effective is the provision?

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection, as a result of the training staff have received and because behaviour is now managed effectively. A little over a third of the teaching is good but there is little that is outstanding. The centre's own targets for improving the quality of teaching and learning reflect the imperative to improve this further. There is a helpful recognition by teachers that most pupils have had poor experiences of traditional learning and that lessons that encourage active and practical learning best capture and sustain their attention. However, not enough lessons are like this. Assessment information is playing its part in helping teachers to tailor work to pupils' capabilities, but this too is inconsistently the case. When lessons are vibrant and the work challenges them pupils are keen to participate and concentrate and they enjoy their learning. Teaching assistants play their part in the school team by taking on responsibilities, but their work in lessons is sometimes not directed clearly enough in teachers' planning and opportunities are lost to capitalise on this valuable resource.

The curriculum suitably focuses on pupils' personal, social and emotional needs as well as their academic and vocational development. The introduction of a therapeutic room where they have circle time discussions, counselling and anger management training is making a valuable contribution. There are suitable plans to reduce the use of alternative placements for pupils so that centre staff can be integrally involved with them for more of the time. Staff know the pupils very well who in turn recognise the good care and support they receive. They are being helped to manage their own difficulties through a system of behaviour targets which are reviewed daily. The informal daily 'tea and toast' session provides a calm start to the day and contributes to a welcoming ethos at the centre.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b> Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	<b>3</b>
	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The headteacher has been successful in getting staff to operate as a team and they feel valued. They are all pulling in the same direction and there is drive and determination to keep up the rate of improvement. The arrangements in place for reviewing the centre's work are systematic and comprehensive. Encouragingly, the headteacher has been influential in changing the pattern of referrals to the centre so that more pupils are not breaking their ties with their mainstream school when they arrive. There is a good array of data gathered, not least in respect of pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance, and

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this shows staff how successful they are and where their attention needs to be focused next. The centre's development plan is mapping out its direction of travel well and regular reviews and revisions are keeping the centre on track. It is a good sign that the support the centre received from the local authority during its period in special measures has been tapered, as the centre stands on its own two feet. These positive moves forward show that the centre has a sound capacity for further improvement. Pupils are treated equally and they understand the notion of fairness. However, occasional remarks from one or two pupils portray discriminatory attitudes which the staff are tackling head on. The pupils are seeing themselves more positively as a community and they have some knowledge of other cultures and different religions, but there is more work to do to ensure that they build on their understanding of community cohesion beyond the school.

The management committee is playing its part in the centre's recovery from special measures and this has been helped by some members having roles in other schools. The committee has written an action plan for itself, which rightly includes the need to become more integrally involved in aspects of the centre's work, so that it can both influence and hold the centre to account more.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

**Views of parents and carers**

This inspection was unannounced and there was no time for the centre to canvas the views of parents and carers in the usual way. However, the centre surveyed the views of parents and carers earlier in the summer term 2010 and the questions reflected the

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Ofsted questionnaire to a large degree. Eleven parents and carers responded and were generally positive about the work of the centre and were particularly pleased with how their children feel safe, communication from the centre and the curriculum experiences given to their children.

## **Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire**

Parental questionnaires are not normally distributed for inspections conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, unless inspectors have specific reasons to request that the school does so.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



25 June 2010

Dear Pupils

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

Most of you know that I have been visiting the centre regularly while it has been in special measures. My recent visit was the fifth and I am pleased to tell you that because of the progress made the centre no longer requires special measures. My special thanks go to those of you I met and for your views about how the centre is doing. You helped me appreciate the improvements that have been made.

Many things are better than at the time of the last inspection in 2008. Your behaviour is much improved although there is still room for this to be better still. Because staff need to spend less time dealing with poor behaviour the quality of teaching and learning has improved and as a result, you are making more progress. Staff watch out for you well and you have good relationships with them. You and your parents and carers say you feel safe at the centre and not surprisingly I found the procedures for keeping you safe to be good. Miss Balderstone and the staff have an accurate view of the centre's strengths and weaknesses because they frequently check on how well things are going. They have plans to tackle the things that need to improve further and one of these things is attendance, which remains low. Although lots of you have better attendance than you did at your previous schools, this needs to improve further if you are to get the most out of your education. You can play your part by turning up every day. I have also asked the staff to improve the quality of teaching even more because the gaps some of you have had in your education mean that you really do need to have high quality lessons that move your learning on at a pace.

I am delighted that the centre is now out of special measures and that the education you are receiving has improved.

I wish each of you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Eric Craven

Her Majesty's Inspector

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