

Inspection of Workington Academy

Stainburn Road, Workington, Cumbria CA14 4EB

Inspection dates: 10–11 March 2020

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud of their school. The pupils that we spoke to talked enthusiastically about the positive changes in recent years. Pupils feel safe. They are happy and confident. There is a calm atmosphere in the school. Relationships between pupils and staff are genuinely positive. Pupils know that they can count on adults in the school to help them out if they have any worries. Bullying is rare. When it happens, pupils, parents and carers say that school staff deal with it well.

Pupils are keen to be successful. They behave well and work hard in lessons. They value the support that they receive from their teachers and pastoral staff.

Leaders, governors and trust staff want the best for every pupil. They have raised the expectations that they have for their pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The new curriculum is ambitious. It is helping pupils to learn more across a range of subjects. However, for some time, pupils have not achieved well in their GCSE examinations.

Pupils enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities that are on offer. Pupils have many opportunities to develop their leadership skills, for example, through involvement in the school council.

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

Since the last inspection, leaders have increased their expectations of staff and pupils. This has brought about improvements, particularly in relation to pupils' behaviour and personal development. The school is rapidly gaining the confidence of its community. The trust and governors have played an important role in bringing about these improvements.

In the last three years the progress that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, have made by the end of Year 11 has been well below that of others nationally. In 2019, the progress that pupils made in mathematics and English was markedly lower than the previous year. There is no doubt that leaders are making inroads to improve the quality of education. However, it is too early to know whether these will have the required impact on pupils' achievement.

The curriculum in recent years has not enabled pupils to gain the knowledge and skills that they require to achieve highly. Leaders have produced a curriculum 'road map' from Year 7 to Year 13 to ensure that pupils have the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed in the next stage of their lives. Some subject leaders are further down the line than others in ensuring that the curriculum is planned and sequenced so that pupils can build on their prior learning in the most effective way. That said, most teachers are now thinking carefully about the most sensible way to order topics so that pupils know and remember more. Teachers are also adapting their teaching to ensure that any gaps in knowledge are closed before moving on.

Pupils with SEND are supported well. Their 'passports' accurately identify their needs and the strategies that will help them to overcome any barriers to learning. Leaders routinely check that teachers take these into consideration when planning the learning. Parents value this provision and the support that their children receive.

Pupils enjoy participating in the many clubs and activities on offer. These enrichment opportunities cater for a full range of interests such as sport, art, community and leadership work. Leaders work hard to encourage the involvement of pupils who would benefit most from these activities. Parents believe that these personal development opportunities help their children to grow in confidence. Pupils benefit from high-quality careers education, advice and guidance. This continues for students in the sixth form.

Leaders' actions have brought about improvements in pupils' behaviour since the last inspection. Most pupils now manage their own behaviour well both in and out of lessons. They move around the school calmly. Pupils listen carefully to their teachers and are engaged in their learning. Work in books is presented well. This reflects pupils' positive attitudes to their studies.

Leaders' actions have resulted in improvements in attendance despite figures being badly affected by the norovirus in the autumn term. That said, concerns remain about the attendance of pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged. Leaders are taking action to address this but too many of these pupils still do not attend school regularly.

Staff feel valued and are proud to be serving pupils in the school. They appreciate leaders' efforts to make their workload manageable. Teachers feel that they are now focusing on the work that brings most benefit to pupils. Parents appreciate the positive difference that leaders are bringing to the school.

Students enjoy the sixth form and have very strong attitudes to their learning. They value the support that they get and feel that they are well prepared for their next stage of education, training or employment. Leaders are ambitious for their students. For example, students are encouraged to apply for Russell Group universities. In both A-level and vocational courses, students are supported to become effective learners and make the progress that is expected of them. Like their younger peers, students in the sixth form have access to a wide range of personal development opportunities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide effective training for all members of staff, including governors. Pastoral leaders build strong relationships with pupils. Staff are prepared to go the extra mile to ensure that no pupil slips through the net.

Leaders make sure that pupils are well informed about keeping themselves safe from harm. The curriculum helps pupils to recognise when they might be vulnerable, particularly when online.

The register that records the checks on all adults in school is comprehensive and meets legal requirements. For example, pre-employment checks make sure that the adults the school employs are suitable to work with children.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum has not equipped pupils with the knowledge and skills that they need to achieve highly. This means that in recent years, pupils have not achieved well in their GCSE examinations. Leaders have taken action to improve the quality of the curriculum throughout the school. Leaders must now ensure that these curriculum changes are implemented well in all subjects. They must make sure that the changes to the curriculum enable pupils to know more and remember more throughout their time in school so that they can be more successful in their GCSE examinations.
- Leaders have taken effective action to improve pupils' overall attendance. Their actions have not been as successful in improving the attendance of pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged. Leaders must continue their efforts to ensure that these 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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	141499
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10143722
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	890
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	100
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	George Beveridge
Headteacher	Des Bird
Website	www.workingtonacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	22–23 May 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Workington Academy is a secondary school with a sixth-form provision.
- The school is part of Cumbria Education Trust.
- The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds is well below the national average.
- A small number of pupils are currently attending alternative provision. The school works with the following providers: West Cumberland Learning Centre and Nisia.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- We met with a range of staff, including the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team. We also met with subject leaders. The lead inspector met with the chair and vice-chair of the local advisory board. She also met with the chief executive of Cumbria Education Trust.
- To evaluate the quality of safeguarding, we spoke with pupils and staff and checked surveys from parents, pupils and staff. A meeting was held with safeguarding leaders and related paperwork was reviewed. Discussions centred on how the school keeps pupils safe. The single central record was checked.
- We spoke to newly and recently qualified teachers and support staff to check their views on pupils' behaviour and attitudes.
- We considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires. This included the pupil survey (169 responses), the staff survey (74 responses), Parent View (105 responses) and the free-text responses to Parent View (68 responses).
- We did deep dives in these subjects: English, history, physical education and modern foreign languages. This involved meetings with subject leaders and joint visits with leaders to a sample of lessons in these subjects. We also looked at books and other kinds of work produced by pupils from the lessons visited. We had discussions with teachers and groups of pupils from the lessons visited. In addition, visits to lessons in other subjects were carried out.

Inspection team

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