

Inspection of West Lakes Academy

Main Street, Egremont, Cumbria CA22 2DQ

Inspection dates:	17 and 18 June 2025
The quality of education	Inadequate
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Inadequate
Sixth-form provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The headteacher of this school is Stephen Grant. This school is part of the Changing Lives Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Judith Schafer, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Davidson.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding for overall effectiveness at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since March 2017. The school received an ungraded inspection under section 8 of the Act on 25 April 2023. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

The curriculum at West Lakes Academy does not help pupils to build the knowledge that they need to achieve well. This is especially true for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils. The school's expectations of pupils' achievement are low. There are considerable weaknesses in how well teachers deliver the curriculum.

Pupils' behaviour makes a positive contribution to the calm atmosphere that exists at the school. They enjoy the respectful relationships that they have with staff, who care for them well. Nevertheless, in lessons, some pupils are not motivated by their learning. Pupils are typically happy at school. In the past, pupils lacked confidence in the school's approach to resolving the concerns that they reported. This has improved. The school now takes swift and appropriate action in response to any issues that pupils share. Pupils feel safe.

Pupils have a limited range of wider opportunities available to them to develop their talents, interests and leadership skills. Some pupils enjoy sports, art and music clubs. As school counsellors, a small group of pupils have begun to shape improvements at the school. Some students in the sixth form act as buddies to younger pupils. Even so, the activities that the school provides do not routinely ensure that pupils become confident and independent young people.

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

The trust has not tackled the weaknesses in the quality of education that were present at the time of the previous ungraded inspection. The trust has not held the school to account effectively. It has failed to address the issues that have led to pupils' weak achievement over time.

The trust and the school have been through a significant period of turbulence and uncertainty since the previous inspection. Leaders at all levels are aware that staff morale in the school has been low. More recently, the trust has worked to stabilise the leadership of the school. It has appointed a substantive headteacher and additional leaders, who know what needs to be done to improve the school. This team has begun to develop systems and procedures to address the issues in the quality of education, but these are in their infancy. As such, there is limited impact on the quality of education that current pupils receive.

Many subject curriculums lack coherence and do not require teachers to deliver ambitious subject content. Consequently, the learning activities that pupils, and some students in the sixth form, complete do not enable them to develop sufficient depth of understanding of the subjects that they study. Many of the tasks that pupils are given limit their ability to build more complex knowledge or to grasp more difficult concepts. As a result, they are not as well prepared as they should be for each stage of their education. In contrast, some students in the sixth form benefit from a vocational curriculum that is well matched

to their needs and interests. These students achieve well and move on to meaningful destinations.

Staff do not make appropriate checks on what pupils know and remember. These checks rarely go beyond the recall of basic facts, which do not help staff to make sure that pupils' deeper learning is secure. Assessment information is not used by staff to address gaps and misunderstandings in pupils' learning sufficiently well. This prevents pupils from building on what they know and can do. Pupils move on to new learning before they are ready. This adversely affects their progress through the curriculum.

The school is at the early stages of developing systems to accurately identify the additional needs of pupils with SEND. The learning of many of these pupils is hampered by the same weaknesses in the quality of education that adversely affects the achievement of others. This is because staff do not have the expertise that they need to provide support for the learning needs of pupils with SEND. In contrast, those pupils who access the school's enhanced programme of support fare much better. Pupils who attend the 'West Lakes Connect' provision receive support that meets their needs, so that their attendance rates and self-belief improve over time.

The school's reading programme is at an early stage of development. It has adopted a suitable approach to helping pupils to close any gaps that they may have in their phonics knowledge. Some older pupils receive the support that they need to become confident readers. However, other pupils do not routinely get the help that they need to read with fluency. This means that they are not able to access the curriculum sufficiently well.

The school provides support to those pupils who struggle to manage their own behaviour. Most pupils respond well to this help. Even so, in lessons, some pupils do not find their studies motivating. The school's expectations of pupils' attitudes to learning are low. It does not help pupils to build the resilience that they need to tackle more complex learning.

Some pupils have high rates of absenteeism. This means that they miss out on essential learning, which has a negative impact on their achievement. Recent actions by the school have strengthened its approach to promoting regular attendance. As a result, pupils' attendance rates have begun to improve.

Pupils know how to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy. They know how to stay safe, including online and in the community. The school ensures that pupils recognise the features of a healthy relationship. Pupils value the differences that may exist between people. The school's programme of careers education enables pupils to make informed decisions about their futures. However, pupils, and some students in the sixth form, do not routinely benefit from a rich programme of wider experiences. As a consequence, pupils are not as well prepared for life in modern Britain as they should be.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The trust has not held the school to account for the decline in the quality of education that pupils receive. As a result, pupils, including pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils and some students in the sixth form, do not achieve well. The trust must ensure that it gains an accurate insight into the school's effectiveness so that it can provide the necessary support and challenge to secure its improvement.
- Teaching is not successfully adapted to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. As a result, these pupils do not progress through the curriculum as well as they should. The school should ensure that all staff are equipped with effective strategies for supporting pupils with SEND and apply these approaches consistently in their teaching, so that pupils with SEND achieve well.
- The activities that staff design to teach the curriculum do not help pupils to develop sufficient depth of knowledge about the subjects that they study. These activities reflect the low aspirations that the school has about what pupils should achieve. This prevents pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, from achieving well. The school must equip staff to deliver the curriculum successfully, so that pupils can build on what they know and develop a deeper understanding of important concepts in the subjects that they study.
- Staff do not routinely address gaps and misconceptions in pupils' knowledge and understanding. They lack clarity about what important knowledge pupils should know or how to make checks on what pupils remember with accuracy. This means that pupils move on to new learning before they have the necessary foundations to succeed. Pupils are not prepared sufficiently well for each year or stage of their education. The school must help staff to address pupils' errors and misunderstandings promptly, so that pupils build their knowledge securely.
- The school has not established consistently high expectations of pupils' attitudes to learning. In lessons, staff do not ensure that pupils make the most of the activities that they design for them. This is because the school has not provided pupils with the support that they need to become resilient learners. The school should clarify the expectations that it has about pupils' attitudes to their learning and ensure that staff receive the support that they need to ensure that all pupils learn successfully.
- The school's provision for pupils' personal development, including for some students in the sixth form, does not prepare them sufficiently well for life in modern Britain. The school's limited range of opportunities to take on responsibilities, or to develop pupils' talents and interests, prevents pupils from becoming confident and independent young people. The school should ensure that pupils make the most of a broad range of opportunities, so that they are well prepared to make a positive contribution to their community.

HMCI strongly recommends that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers. The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any monitoring inspection we carry out.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	135632
Local authority	Cumberland
Inspection number	10321416
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy 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	1095
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	148
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Davidson
CEO of the trust	Judith Schafer
Headteacher	Stephen Grant
Website	https://wla.education
Date of previous inspection	25 and 26 April 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The substantive headteacher took up post on 1 June 2025. Prior to this, the trust appointed interim headteachers in September 2024 and in February 2025.
- The CEO of the trust took up post in the summer 2024, having previously been the deputy CEO.
- A significant number of the senior leadership team have been appointed to their roles since September 2024. A director of English and a director of mathematics have been appointed by the trust to take up their roles on 1 September 2025.
- The school is part of the Changing Lives Learning Trust.

- Since the last inspection, many of the members of the trust board, and the local governing body, including the chair of the trust and chair of the local governing body, have been appointed.
- The school makes use of one registered and two unregistered alternative provisions.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school 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 school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, mathematics, science, history, art and design and design and technology. They discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited some lessons, reviewed pupils' work and spoke with staff and pupils.
- Inspectors visited lessons and looked at pupils' work in some other subjects.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the trust, the CEO, the headteacher, the two interim headteachers and other members of the senior leadership team.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with the local governing body, including the chair of governors. He also spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors met with leaders to discuss SEND, the curriculum, assessment, pupils' behaviour and attitudes, the early years provision and the provision for pupils' personal development.
- Inspectors visited the school's own internal alternative provision called West Lakes Connect and its inclusion base.

- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They considered the responses to Ofsted’s online staff and pupil surveys. Inspectors gathered the views of staff and pupils throughout the inspection.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils’ interests first.
- Inspectors observed pupils’ behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors spoke with staff about their workload and well-being.

Inspection team

Andy Cunningham, lead inspector	His Majesty’s Inspector
Julie Yarwood	Ofsted Inspector
Liz Kelly	Ofsted Inspector
David Woodhouse	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Edmondson	Ofsted Inspector

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