

Solway Community Technology College

Liddell Street, Silloth, Wigton, Cumbria CA7 4DD

Inspection dates

22–23 November 2016

| Overall effectiveness | Requires improvement |
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| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Requires improvement |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils do not make consistently good progress across year groups and subjects so attainment is too low at the end of Year 11 for many pupils.
- Boys make slower progress than girls, whatever their starting points.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving, but is not yet good enough to enable them to reach standards in line with the national average.
- The quality of teaching and learning has not been strong enough over time to ensure that all pupils make good progress.
- Not all teachers apply the school's behaviour management policy effectively.
- Not all teachers plan tasks that stretch the most able pupils so not enough of them are making good progress.
- Rates of attendance are broadly average across the school but the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils is below average.

The school has the following strengths

- The school is improving. The new headteacher has changed the culture of the school and very quickly identified priorities for improvement.
- Faculty leaders are playing a key role in supporting school improvement and working to provide the consistency still required to ensure that all teaching is good.
- Pupils' welfare is given a high priority and safeguarding is managed well.
- Pupils behave well around the school. They are courteous and polite.
- Recently introduced strategies to develop pupils' resilience and problem-solving skills are beginning to raise standards, particularly in key stage 3.
- The governing body increasingly holds the school to account. Improved tracking systems ensure that governors have a clear awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the school which enables them to ask challenging questions.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement by ensuring that:
 - boys' achievement matches that of girls
 - disadvantaged pupils make accelerated progress and close the gaps with their peers
 - rates of attendance for all groups of pupils, and particularly disadvantaged pupils, at least match national averages.
- Further improve the quality of teaching and learning, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers apply the behaviour management strategy consistently
 - having higher expectations of what pupils can and should achieve, including for the most able
 - embedding strategies to develop pupils' skills in literacy.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has taken decisive action since her appointment to address a long legacy of underachievement. She is passionate about wanting the best for pupils and the whole community. Senior leaders, staff and governors share her vision for continual improvement.
- The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Teaching in mathematics and science is much stronger than previously. School leaders have introduced strategies to develop pupils' problem-solving skills. The school has introduced independent study lessons to provide opportunities for pupils to plan and work individually in order to foster their resilience and preparation for life after school. This is contributing to improving standards, particularly at key stage 3.
- The school has forged good partnerships with others in the area to provide additional moderation for the judgements teachers make on the quality of their work. Regular monitoring and review meetings usually affirm the quality of the school's work.
- Faculty leaders have implemented new systems to check on the quality of teaching and learning so that they know strengths and areas for development well. Individual teachers are supported where necessary, as are newly qualified teachers. The result of leaders' work is seen in the stronger progress evident this year for pupils across the school, especially in English, mathematics and science.
- Teachers are an enthusiastic and committed team working hard to improve their practice and so raise standards for all pupils. Staff morale is high and teachers are proud to be part of an improving school. Leaders are aware that more needs to be done to ensure the consistency of teaching across all subjects. At times, the right level of challenge is not provided to ensure that pupils make the progress of which they are capable. All staff do not apply the school's behaviour management strategy consistently.
- The school has been successful in recruiting new teachers and has a good retention rate for teachers serving at the school.
- Pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils has not been used to best effect in the past. The focus is now on ensuring that funding is used to improve overall outcomes for pupils across a range of subjects. Actions include providing small teaching groups, one-to-one support where necessary and measures to raise the attendance of a minority of pupils. Published information about the progress of disadvantaged pupils can be misleading because the groups are small in each year. The school is now focusing on the progress of all disadvantaged pupils across Years 7 to 11. The overall picture this term is that the gap is narrowing between the progress of these pupils and all pupils nationally.
- The leader of special educational needs is ensuring that these pupils receive comprehensive and bespoke support and they are now making better progress. The school has a growing reputation in the area for the quality of its provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- Pastoral leadership is focused on improving attendance and the behaviour of the small minority of pupils, mainly boys, who are less engaged in their education than the great majority. The school prides itself on never giving up on any pupil. Nevertheless, the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils is below national average and this has a negative impact on their learning.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is used well to raise the standards of literacy and numeracy for those pupils arriving at the school with lower than average attainment in English or mathematics.
- The curriculum has been adjusted to maximise pupils' achievement. More time has been allocated to English, mathematics and science to compensate for weaker teaching in the past. Creative subjects such as textiles, drama and animation are taught in a carousel of sessions so that pupils experience all options. The school buys in expertise from the local authority music service which enables pupils to have individual tuition in a number of different instruments. A recent innovation is the introduction of 25 minute lessons every day that are used to deepen mastery in English and mathematics in key stage 3 and to provide specific examination practice in different subjects in key stage 4.
- Leaders enrich the curriculum with a wide range of trips and visits; for example, pupils have visited the University of Cumbria and Year 7 pupils have visited Borrowdale. Pupils have taken part in the BBC schools report day, celebrated British science day, and had a day focused on robotics. Year 11 have attended a 'work-ready' day at a nearby school.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered through the work of different departments and citizenship lessons. Pupils learn directly from experts in the police, fire and lifeboat services about the value of these services. They understand the importance of tolerance, free speech and respect for other cultures from work in the humanities subjects particularly. Awareness of different faiths is promoted through religious education, visits to mosques and local churches and speakers raising awareness, for example, of Holocaust Memorial day. The school works well with Cumbria University to raise the aspirations of all pupils and broaden their horizons.
- Occasionally, the school makes arrangements for a few pupils who at 16 are not yet ready to move to other schools or sixth forms, to stay on into Year 12. This is done in collaboration with nearby Caldew School. A small group successfully achieved AS-level passes in 2015. Currently there are no students in Year 12.
- The local authority has supported the school effectively, particularly in improving science and literacy.

Governance of the school

- The governors are ambitious, supportive and committed to the school and are well aware of its value in the community.
- Governors bring a range of skills and experience which they use generously to support and challenge leaders at all levels. Governors ensure that there is a fair and consistent policy that rewards the best teaching.

- The quality of information about teaching, learning and progress that governors now receive from the headteacher is much more detailed and analytical. This enables them to ask searching questions where performance is weaker and to challenge the school to do even better.
- Governors specifically check the impact of pupil premium funding. In the recent past too much attention has been given to the pastoral support for these pupils and not enough on their academic progress. As a result, governors' overall objectives have not always been sufficiently focused on the areas of weakness that the school needs to address most urgently. They are doing this much more effectively now.
- Governors ensure that finance is well managed.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Regular training is rigorous for all staff, including non-teaching staff. The school has effective links with other appropriate safeguarding agencies. Governors regularly check the quality of the school's safeguarding systems. Policies and procedures are effective in ensuring that there is a culture of vigilance across the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not yet consistently good across all subjects, or within some subjects such as English, to secure good progress for all pupils. Improvements in the quality of teaching have not yet secured stronger progress for boys or for disadvantaged pupils.
- Some teachers are setting a pace of learning that is too slow so pupils can become distracted and lose concentration and then behaviour deteriorates. Not all teachers apply the school's behaviour management strategy consistently or effectively which can slow the pace of learning for pupils.
- There is a whole-school policy regarding developing pupils' skills in literacy but too few teachers provide opportunities for pupils to write at length.
- A few teachers do not routinely challenge the most able pupils to think, speak and write to high levels.
- There have been improvements to the weaknesses in teaching identified at the previous inspection. Notably, most teachers are now setting work which is more closely matched to pupils' different levels of ability. Improvements are evident in the teaching of mathematics and science. Teachers apply the school's marking policy consistently.
- Good learning is clearly evident in some subjects. Examples include pupils enthusiastically making good progress in physical education and Year 9 pupils confidently speaking Spanish and making strong progress in modern languages. Pace and challenge are very evident in geography and religious education. In hospitality and catering, pupils in Year 11 were engrossed in practising and preparing for a banquet for a hundred guests as part of their GCSE assessment.

- The short, focused lessons each morning support pupils' development of literacy and mastery of mathematics in key stage 3. In key stage 4 these additional lessons are used to help pupils fill in gaps in their knowledge and provide extra challenge.
- More pupils than previously are now starting Year 7 with average levels of ability and so teachers are adjusting their work to take account of this higher profile of attainment on entry. In Years 10 and 11, pupils started with significantly below average prior attainment. For pupils currently in key stage 3 this is no longer the case.
- Teachers are helping pupils to develop research skills in independent study lessons. Small groups of pupils choose a challenge from three options and must plan how they will go about it, then actually complete the challenge and finally evaluate their own performance. They receive detailed feedback from their teachers. This strategy is helping pupils to become more self-reliant, develop research skills and engage effectively in learning.
- Teaching assistants play a valuable role in supporting the learning of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They provide further explanations where necessary, rather than doing the work for pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school takes great care of pupils, especially those who are vulnerable or in need of extra support. Pupils receive one-to-one mentoring and in-class support when necessary.
- Pupils' good manners are evident across the school. They welcome visitors, open doors for staff, move around in a calm environment and show respect for each other and for adults. There is no graffiti or litter around the school. Queues at lunchtime are orderly.
- The great majority of pupils are proud of their school and its place in the wider community. They are enthusiastic fund-raisers and have many letters of thanks and praise to show from different charities in recognition of their generosity. Members of the local community are regularly invited to share in events such as afternoon teas and roast dinners. Pupils support the local community by activities such as litter-picking and raising funds for the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.
- Pupils agree that there is little or no bullying in school and any that occurs is quickly dealt with by staff. They comment that 'teachers are fair'.
- Pupils feel safe in school and understand how to keep themselves safe in a variety of potentially hazardous situations; they learn about issues such as abuse of drugs, the dangers of extremism and rules for safe use of the internet.
- Most pupils are aware of how to be successful learners and are responding well to the school's innovative approach to building resilience and problem-solving skills.
- The school checks rigorously on the behaviour, welfare and progress of pupils attending alternative provision to make sure that they are safe and well cared for and

achieve useful qualifications.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- When teaching is effective pupils are responsive, enthusiastic and very positive in their approach to learning. When teaching is less effective the behaviour of a minority of pupils, mainly boys, deteriorates. The school has effective strategies to address this but these are not applied consistently by all staff.
- There have been no external exclusions in the last two academic years. The school has an internal isolation strategy for any instances of disruption, which is effective. The school admits pupils excluded from elsewhere in managed moves and prides itself on supporting pupils who have found it difficult to behave well in the past.
- Attendance is broadly average. Rates of attendance have taken a dip so far this year because of three bouts of illness in the area. The school has a range of strategies, including working with other agencies, to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils who do not attend school regularly compared with other pupils. Although this has resulted in some improvement, the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils remains below the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Historically, attainment for Year 11 has been weak. Pupils enter the school with significantly lower levels of prior attainment and do not reach national averages. However, the most recent data for Year 11 in 2016 shows that the proportion of pupils who achieved good GCSE passes in English and mathematics increased.
- Published data does not give an accurate picture because groups are small and outcomes can vary widely from year to year. In addition, pupil mobility is high. Nearly half of the pupils in Year 11 in 2015 did not start in Year 7 and over a third did not start in Year 7 in the 2016 cohort. This means that data must be interpreted with caution.
- In 2016, Year 11 pupils made less progress overall than their peers in the previous year.
- Boys have traditionally made slower progress than girls. Accelerating the progress of boys across all subjects is an urgent priority for the school.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils vary from year to year. In 2015, Year 11 pupils did better than others but not in 2016. Overall, the difference between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils across the school and others nationally is diminishing slowly.
- The achievement of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities varies but has been consistently well below average. Some of these pupils have exceptionally low starting points. Improved teaching and support is helping these pupils to make faster progress this year compared to previously.
- The most able pupils make the progress that is expected of them but few excel.
- A review of the work in pupils' books across all year groups in a range of subjects

shows that progress is increasing for many pupils. All pupils have targets in their books which are increasingly challenging. Most take care and pride in the presentation of their work and respond well to advice from their teachers on how to improve. This improved progress evident in books is confirmed by the school's tracking information which shows stronger progress now than at the same time last year.

- Pupils are responding well to new kinds of learning which encourages independent research skills and further develops literacy and numeracy. The initiatives now in place have not been established long enough to have a major impact on outcomes for pupils in Year 10 and 11. Progress in Years 7, 8 and 9 is improving at a faster rate than for pupils in key stage 4.
- Pupils benefit from effective external careers advice which helps them to plan the next stage of their education, training or employment. Their positive personal development and awareness of British values contributes well to their preparedness for the future.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 112377 |
| Local authority | Cumbria |
| Inspection number | 10019809 |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 149 |
| Appropriate authority | Local authority |
| Chair | Professor Simon Pimblott |
| Headteacher | Judith Schafer |
| Telephone number | 01697 331234 |
| Website | www.solwayschool.co.uk |
| Email address | wendy.wise@solway.cumbria.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 12–13 November 2014 |

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Solway Community Technical College is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It has very high pupil mobility.
- The very great majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds. No pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision at Lakes College and the West Cumbria Learning Centre.
- Since the previous inspection there has been considerable turnover of staffing and a new headteacher was appointed in September 2015.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in most subjects and across both key stages. Some observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors looked at a range of work in pupils' books in many subjects across the school either in lessons or as a separate activity.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, faculty leaders, other members of staff, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. Discussions were held over the internet with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body who were abroad during the inspection.
- Three groups of pupils met inspectors from key stage 3 and key stage 4.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including: the school's self-evaluation and action plans; information about pupils' attainment and progress; records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance; the school's safeguarding and other policies; and records on checking on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at the start and end of the school day, at breaks and lunchtimes, visited tutor times and attended one assembly. They talked to many pupils informally at these times and in lessons. Inspectors also considered the 14 responses to the Ofsted pupil online questionnaire as well as the school's internal pupil surveys.
- Inspectors gained the views of parents from the 18 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.
- The views of staff were gained from the 22 responses to the online staff questionnaire and from discussions with individual teachers and other members of staff.

Inspection team

Judith Straw, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Tanya Sheaff

Ofsted Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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