

Cairn Education CIC

Address: The Tavern, 63 Main Street, Staveley, Cumbria, LA8 9LN

Unique reference number (URN): 148796

Inspection report: 17 March 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.
- **Insufficient evidence:** Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

Strong standard ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

All pupils have an education, health and care plan, with autism as their main need. Pupils join the school after long periods of disengagement from education and, in some cases, even from everyday experiences. This means that many pupils' starting points are very low. Most pupils have considerable worries about school life, and have stopped believing that they can learn.

Leaders and staff are highly committed to helping pupils re-engage with education. They spend time getting to know pupils very well. They skilfully identify pupils' interests and use these to support engagement with the curriculum. Barriers to learning are removed effectively. Consequently, pupils develop confidence and begin to re-engage with learning, making notable progress over time. They achieve well and gain appropriate qualifications, including GCSEs and foundation courses. All pupils leaving the school in 2025 went on to employment, further education or training. Information about pupils' destinations shows that they consistently move on to further study or to meaningful employment.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Pupils have experienced many barriers to learning in their previous education. For instance, some have had unmet special educational needs and/or disabilities. Their mental or physical health may have suffered as a result of these experiences. Many pupils have had low attendance in the past, and some have been absent from education altogether.

Leaders are systematic in their work to understand and address barriers to pupils' attendance. They work consistently with parents, carers and professionals to ensure that where support is needed, it is provided promptly. Consequently, once admitted to the school, pupils' attendance improves considerably. Persistent absence reduces accordingly and pupils attend regularly.

Pupils behave well. Through the precise support they receive, pupils learn to understand their emotions and regulate their behaviour effectively. This helps them to manage their own behaviour well, so that they get the most from the school day. As a result, the school is an oasis of calm, where pupils can thrive. Leaders and staff have established a positive culture in which bullying is rare. They take swift and appropriate action to address any concerns.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

The school has created a broad and engaging curriculum that rekindles pupils' interest in learning. This ambitious curriculum takes full account of pupils' particular special educational needs and/or disabilities. For instance, great care has been taken to include knowledge that pupils may have missed as a result of absence from previous education. This means that once they join the school, pupils begin to secure the knowledge they have previously missed, enabling them to build new learning on more secure foundations.

Leaders ensure that staff have strong subject knowledge. In addition, staff have the professional expertise that they need to present information in ways that pupils understand. Pupils benefit from careful adaptations that help them to learn well. Teachers quickly spot and address any misconceptions that pupils may have. Consequently, pupils develop a detailed body of knowledge over time. This helps to prepare them well for the next stage in their education, employment or training.

Leaders are meticulous in their work to understand the quality of the curriculum in each subject. They draw upon information such as reviews of pupils' work to check the impact of the curriculum on pupils' knowledge. This enables leaders to refine the curriculum so that it continues to meet pupils' needs.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders have placed inclusion at the heart of the school's work. It permeates every aspect of the school's provision, from the curriculum to pastoral support. Leaders take a thorough and coordinated approach to identifying and reducing barriers to pupils' learning and wellbeing. As a result, pupils develop a strong sense of belonging.

Leaders and staff communicate effectively with parents and carers and other professionals to build a clear understanding of pupils' needs, including those linked to their individual special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have ensured that staff have the skills and knowledge to adjust their teaching so that it meets these needs consistently, enabling pupils to access the curriculum successfully and learn securely over time.

Leaders, including governors, check rigorously to make sure that the support that pupils receive continues to be effective over time. Leaders and staff respond quickly and effectively to any changes in pupils' wider needs, such as in relation to their mental health, so that pupils can continue to learn. As a result, pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged achieve consistently well from their starting points.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

The proprietor and leaders draw on a range of information to understand how well the school is working for pupils. For example, they make systematic checks on the effectiveness of the curriculum and teaching. This provides the proprietor with a clear and accurate overview of the school's strengths and areas for further development, enabling leaders to set clear priorities for improvement.

The proprietor and leaders have a robust understanding of the barriers faced by pupils. They ensure that pupils' best interests are at the heart of all their decisions. For instance, the proprietor has ensured that the school works effectively with families and professionals to keep pupils safe.

The proprietor has ensured that a number of skilled and knowledgeable individuals are members of the governing body. This is to strengthen challenge and support and enable the proprietor to hold itself to account for its work to improve the school. For instance, governors ask questions to make sure that all necessary checks are carried out on newly appointed staff. This extra layer of oversight strengthens the school's leadership capacity. The

proprietor has ensured that all of the independent school standards continue to be met consistently.

The proprietor ensures that staff have the right opportunities to develop their professional knowledge. For example, staff draw on research to understand the most effective ways to support pupils' learning and wellbeing. Staff value leaders' consideration of their workload and wellbeing. As a result, staff are able to sustain effective practice, supporting positive outcomes for pupils.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard 

Leaders have created a carefully planned programme of activities for pupils' personal development and wellbeing. This programme prepares pupils effectively for life beyond school, including greater independence.

Pupils have plentiful opportunities to develop an awareness of their own beliefs, thoughts and ideas. Leaders and staff have created a climate in which pupils feel that their views are valued. This encourages them to engage thoughtfully and respectfully in discussions, for example, about ethical issues and environmental matters.

Leaders have ensured that every opportunity is taken to teach pupils about fundamental British values, such as the rule of law and democracy. Pupils learn about diversity and difference, for example, in family structures. They learn to recognise prejudice and stereotypical ideas, and to challenge these. Pupils consider different perspectives, including those of others in their school community and beyond. They learn to recognise how their own opinions evolve, broaden and develop over time.

Through the curriculum, pupils learn about risks posed to their wellbeing, such as through online activity. Leaders work effectively with external agencies, such as the police. As a result, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, for example, when participating in gaming communities. Pupils learn to take responsibility for their own nutrition, personal hygiene and fitness. They receive a programme of relationships and sex education that is age-appropriate and sensitively delivered.

Pupils benefit from a well-thought-out programme of independent careers advice and guidance. Through the school's close links with local employers and colleges, pupils secure meaningful work experiences that support their progression to further education or employment. These activities prepare pupils consistently well for the next stage in their education or working lives.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils arrive at school each day with calm confidence. They feel safe and secure because of the positive relationships that they have with staff. Pupils experience consistent, predictable routines, which help them to feel at ease because they know what to expect. As a result, pupils settle quickly and make the most of their school day.

Pupils are consistently polite and respectful to adults and to each other. They learn to regulate their behaviour well. Adults rarely have to remind them how to conduct themselves. This creates a calm, orderly environment, where pupils can learn without disruption.

Many pupils have experienced long periods of absence from their earlier education. Some have previously disengaged from school altogether. However, they quickly re-engage with learning when they join this school. Pupils develop positive attitudes to their education and begin to consider their future aspirations. Consequently, pupils are motivated to attend and participate in their learning.

All pupils have an education, health and care plan for their special educational needs and/or disabilities. Many have needs that are complex. All have faced significant barriers to their earlier learning. Regardless of these challenges, staff expect pupils to try their best and to commit to their learning. Pupils rise to these expectations, make secure progress from their starting points and are well prepared for their next steps.

Next steps

- The proprietor and leaders should sustain the effectiveness of their work in all areas. They should seek continued improvement, overcoming barriers and challenges, in order to drive a transformational impact for all the pupils that attend the school.
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About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this standard inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, and checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, who is also the chair of the proprietor body. They also spoke with the school business manager and with a number of staff during the inspection. The lead inspector spoke with the chair of the governing body.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school caters for pupils with autism. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Some pupils have additional special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The school uses one registered alternative provider.

The school operates from The Tavern, 63 Main Street, Staveley, Cumbria LA8 9LN.

Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed.

The chair of the proprietor body is Rachael Thompson.

The fees currently charged are £38,000 to £60,900.

The school's e-mail address is info@cairneducation.co.uk.

Headteacher: Rachael Thompson

Independent school standards

Independent school standards are either met or not met for each category.

1. Quality of education provided

Standards met

All standards have been met.

2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Standards met

All standards have been met.

3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Standards met

All standards have been met.

4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Standards met

All standards have been met.

5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Standards met

All standards have been met.

All standards have been met.

All standards have been met.

All standards have been met.

Lead inspector:
Mavis Smith, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:
Cleo Cunningham, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.

 This data is from 17 March 2026

Total pupils

10

School capacity

10

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

Insufficient evidence

Inspectors were unable to gather reliable enough evidence to grade an evaluation area. This is rare and normally only happens if there are no pupils on roll at the school.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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