

# Penn School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	133586
<b>Local Authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	360538
<b>Inspection dates</b>	6–7 October 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	ELIZABETH (LIZ) BULL

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

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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<b>Type of school</b>	All-through
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	88
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	38
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Pat Bartle
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Mary-Nest Richardson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	4 June 2008
<b>School address</b>	Church Road High Wycombe HP10 8LZ
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<b>Age group</b>	11–19
<b>Inspection dates</b>	6–7 October 2010
<b>Inspection number</b>	360538

**Boarding provision**

**Social care Unique Reference Number**

SC042644

**Social care inspector**

Harun Rashid

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**Age group** 11–19

**Inspection dates** 6–7 October 2010

**Inspection number** 360538

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## Introduction

This integrated inspection of the school and residential provision was carried out by two additional inspectors and an inspector of social care. The inspectors visited 18 lessons and saw 15 teachers in school and activities in the boarding provision. Meetings were held with groups of students, governors and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at the school improvement plan, assessment and tracking information, planning, the school's monitoring records, policies and 34 parent and/or carer questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- Whether or not teachers check up on students' progress and identify next steps in learning well enough.
- How well senior staff analyse students' information on performance and identify any underachievement.
- Is progress for students in the sixth form fast enough?
- Whether or not the boarding provision provides effective support for students to move on to the next stage.

## Information about the school

Penn School is a non-maintained day and boarding school for students with communication difficulties associated with hearing impairment, autistic spectrum conditions or speech and language difficulties. British Sign Language is the first language for nine of the students with hearing impairment. There are currently 16 boarders. Boys outnumber girls. The school attracts students from a wide geographical area. Since 2008, the school has seen a significant growth in numbers from 66 students to 88 students with the largest expansion seen in the sixth form.

**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?****2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

## Main findings

Penn School, including the boarding department, provides a good quality education and excellent care. It meets fully its core aim of providing a therapeutic and nurturing environment focused on the whole child. Students' well-being and learning are promoted particularly well by the excellent curriculum and collaborative working alongside an extensive range of professionals from other agencies. Relationships between staff and students are very strong and a crucial factor in the school's success. Students, many of whom have had disruption to their schooling in the past, quickly gain the personal and social skills that prepare them extremely effectively for their future lives. This is particularly so in sixth form where provision is outstanding. Students' health, safety and well-being are at the forefront of the school's outstanding ethos of care, as shown by the good practice and procedures for safeguarding. The students are clearly very happy at the school and their excellent behaviour and social development reflect this. The vast majority of parents and carers hold the school in very high regard and their comments about the difference it has made to their children affirm this. For example, more than one parent commented, 'We couldn't have found a better school.'

Teaching overall is good. Some of it is outstanding. The use of sensory integration techniques and procedures is exemplary. Teachers have a very good understanding of students' individual needs. As a result, the students enjoy their lessons and respond by trying their best. The assessment of the students' progress is not, however, fully effective because teachers record progress in different ways and sometimes assessment is not used consistently to inform planning. While students' progress is analysed and tracked on an individual level, the analysis of groups is less well developed and lacks rigour.

Senior leaders and managers have high expectations for the education and care of students. They have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and have demonstrated their ability to move the school forward by the improvements since the last inspection. Self-evaluation is mainly accurate. This track record of improvement demonstrates that the school has good capacity to improve and offers good value for money. While monitoring and evaluation are effective, it is not always used clearly to demonstrate the impact of the measures introduced upon outcomes for students. The governing body is very committed, supports the school well and challenges where necessary

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

- Refine the use of data so the school is able to present a clearer picture of progress, particularly that of different groups of students.
- Improve assessment by:

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- establishing a common set of procedures that all teachers use
- ensuring that assessment information is used to the full when planning lessons.
- Use information from monitoring and evaluation more rigorously to measure improvement and demonstrate the impact of initiatives upon the students' social and academic progress
- The school must ensure that it meets the National Minimum Standards for boarding which have not been met.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**2**

From low starting points, students clearly develop their skills and increase their levels of understanding and communication to enable them to become more independent. Older students achieve an increasing range of qualifications in their work and are well prepared for the next stage in their lives when they leave school. In lessons, students work hard and learn well because they are given consistent encouragement and support when they need it. They make particularly good progress in communication, numeracy and personal, social and health education because staff make good use of targets and students know exactly what they have to do next. There is no discernible difference in lessons in the achievement of the different groups within the school, including those with hearing impairment.

The school does much to promote students' self-esteem, ensuring that they feel highly valued as individuals. Students respond really well to sensitive intervention from adults and as a result, students' behaviour around school and in lessons is outstanding. Students show by their good attendance that they enjoy school. They say they feel extremely safe in school and have the confidence to turn to an adult for help with any concerns. Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and many take advantage of the wide range of physical activities offered to them by the school, including horticulture, swimming and horse riding. Students willingly undertake jobs around the school and many take part in the school council.

Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is excellent and fully supported by the activities in school. For example, the high quality artwork and music they experience, visits to different local places of worship and visitors to school of different religious backgrounds enable students to widen their experiences and awareness of different religions.

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

<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

\* In sixth form schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

## How effective is the provision?

The level of provision is very effective in meeting the wide range of special needs of students within the school and enables so many to make excellent progress in many aspects of their personal development. Teaching and learning are effective because staff plan activities carefully and make learning enjoyable. There is a highly effective approach to behaviour management. Staff use the positive relationships they have with pupils to plan well for them to enjoy engaging in a wide range of experiences. Since the last inspection, there has been a focus on using assessment, particularly the use of target setting, as a means of improving students' learning. While the school acknowledges there is more work to be done on assessment, all staff take a consistent approach to letting students know what is expected of them in the classroom through the use of personal targets. They are shown what they need to do to maximise their opportunities to learn. Each lesson has a clear structure, well understood by the students. Students are given encouragement, at regular intervals during the school day, to evaluate how well they have achieved and whether they have met their targets. Consequently, teachers have good assessment information on students but systems for recording progress are variable across the school and, occasionally, this is not used consistently or effectively to plan the next steps in learning.

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The school places very good emphasis on the development of students' communication, personal development and independence skills and this is effective in promoting their confidence and their access to learning opportunities. For instance, teachers ensure that students with autism have full access to the curriculum through the well-planned use of visual cues and timetables. Learning is enriched extremely well by a wide range of additional activities. These include culturally themed days and special events such as 'Penn's Got Talent Show'. The school makes exceptionally good use of the support provided by a range of other professionals in meeting students' needs and there is extensive liaison with members of the therapeutic and health team. When students have additional needs due to their social circumstances, health needs or behaviour, the school responds flexibly and effectively.

Parents are delighted with the way the school cares for their children, one says their child has 'grown in confidence' while another comments that, 'My son has made amazing progress'.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides good leadership and is well supported by her senior team. They have established a happy, purposeful environment where adults and students thrive. The senior team works hard to drive improvement and embed ambition. The school gathers good data about the progress made by individual students and is fast developing its ability to make useful comparisons with national benchmarks. Senior managers are making increasingly good use of information from monitoring and evaluation to demonstrate improvement and impact. The school has established very effective ways of tracking individual students' progress, but does not yet make a full analysis of the progress of all the groups of students with whom it works.

The school takes a careful approach to safeguarding and ensures that checks, risk assessments and staff training are in place. The governing body is supportive of the school and knows where improvements are needed. Members of the governing body are currently undertaking training to ensure that they are even more effective at holding the school to account for its performance.

The school is effective in ensuring that all have equality of opportunity, and in tackling discrimination, which results in an inclusive ethos. It has developed and is implementing an effective equality plan. Community cohesion has been given a good emphasis throughout the school and plans are in place to further promote cohesion especially at a global level. A particular strength is the way in which students are prepared, especially, for



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their future life. There has been continued improvement over all aspects of the school since the previous inspection.

*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	2
<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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</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>2</b>

## Sixth form

Sixth form students participate in an excellent curriculum which is personalised and relevant for improving levels of independence while ensuring rapid academic progress. All of the students enjoy their time in the sixth form, and are very enthusiastic about the opportunities they are given. The sixth form is excellently led and managed and opportunities for transferring skills to real-life situations are strong, enabling students to take an ever-increasing responsibility for themselves and their own well-being. A good example of this is the work-skills learning programme where students have the chance to visit local colleges and participate in a range of vocational courses including motor mechanics. All students make outstanding gains in their learning and leave school with an excellent range of academic qualifications and work-related learning experiences and these ensure that students are very well prepared for the next step in their learning.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

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## Boarding provision

The quality of the boarding provision at Penn is good, and some features are outstanding.

Working in partnership with young people, health, education and social services, the school contributes very well to identifying, monitoring and meeting young people's health needs. The use of multi-disciplinary teams to support young people is effective and successful. Boarders are encouraged to eat healthily. The school employs two on-site nurses who administer medication to boarders and maintain thorough records of this. Medication is safely stored and first aid boxes are provided throughout the school. However, only one member of care staff has a valid first aid qualification which is not sufficient to cover during the night. The school is currently making arrangements for first aid training.

Boarders' privacy and confidentiality is promoted by the policy in place, the practice of staff and through the secure storage of boarders' records. Complaints are appropriately recorded and managed according to the school's procedures. An appropriate safeguarding policy and procedure are in place. Staff have attended safeguarding training and have real awareness of how to keep children safe. Behaviour support plans and individual risk assessments identify well the needs of each boarder, and staff are suitably trained and deployed. Safer recruitment practices are adopted which follow sound policies and procedures. Health and safety issues are monitored regularly by senior staff.

Teaching staff work closely with care staff to ensure continuity in communication and behaviour management. Each boarder has a home–school book for consultation and recording by staff. Boarders are provided with good facilities that are conducive to study and they are supported by care staff to complete homework. Boarders have access to a wide range of on-site facilities including a games room and gym. In addition to these, boarders participate in a range of activities outside of the school. Boarders are well supported to develop good communication skills, confidence and general life skills.

Boarders' opinions and those of their families are sought and valued over key decisions which affect their daily life and their future. At the beginning of the school year staff hold an assembly where they use speech, British Sign Language, written signs and role play to explain the school council to new students. A multi-disciplinary team, that includes parents and carers, contributes to individual children's placement plans. These plans identify clearly how objectives for each child are to be met while at the school.

Students enjoy and value their boarding experience where they feel secure and well cared for. Older students are able to move into a maisonette, where they have greater independence. While there are sufficient numbers of toilets and bathrooms, boarders are currently unable to use shower facilities due to health and safety reasons. The school is seeking to resolve this. The head of care advised the inspector that boarders can use shower facilities in the maisonette.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff have attended equality and diversity training. The school promotes a culture of inclusion and celebrates a range of religious festivals to incorporate the diverse ethnic backgrounds of students and staff. Appropriate adaptations have been made to accommodate students with limited mobility. Staff support boarders to make personal choices and to access community resources. The school provides a service tailored to meet the specific individual needs of boarders that consider all aspects of diversity.

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Parents, carers and students can access clear information about what boarding can offer through the Statement of Purpose and the young people's guide. There is a stable and well-qualified staff group in the boarding provision, who are experienced and proficient. Appropriate staffing arrangements are in place to meet young people's assessed needs. All care staff receive regular supervision and annual appraisals led by the head of care. Weekly staff meetings promote good communication among the staff team.

There is a system in place to monitor the quality of boarding against the aims outlined in the Statement of Purpose. While members of the governing body conduct monitoring visits, some of the reports they produce are very brief and these lack detailed analysis or demonstrate how improvements are to be achieved.

### **National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care**

- NMS 14.9. Ensure that at least one member of care staff on each shift holds a current first aid qualification (NMS 14.9).
- NMS 33.3 Ensure that the governing body's reports address fully the areas listed in NMS 33.3.

*These are the grades for the boarding provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the boarding provision</b>	<b>2</b>
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### **Views of parents and carers**

Almost all parents and carers who returned the questionnaires are very supportive of the school. The inspection confirms their views. In particular, they feel their children enjoy school and make good progress. The vast majority feel that the school is led and managed well and are satisfied with the experience provided for their children. Inspection findings confirm these positive comments. A very small minority of parents expressed concern about communication with the school and this was followed up by inspectors who looked at a sample of home?school books and annual review questionnaires. The inspectors found that overall there is a good partnership with parents and carers, with effective communication.

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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Penn School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 34 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 88 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	19	56	13	38	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	26	76	6	18	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	15	44	15	44	2	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	17	50	13	38	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	19	56	13	38	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	47	11	32	3	9	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	50	14	41	2	6	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	15	44	12	35	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	59	12	35	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	59	11	32	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	44	16	47	1	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	19	56	13	38	0	0	1	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	21	62	11	32	1	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are 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 and spring terms 2009/10 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 pupils' 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.**



8 October 2010

Dear Students

**Inspection of Penn School, High Wycombe, HP10 8LZ**

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit you recently. We had a lovely time visiting your classrooms, watching you play outside in the sunshine and seeing how much you were enjoying your time in school. Thank you for sharing your views and making us feel so welcome. You go to a good school where the care and support that you receive from everyone are outstanding. Those who look after you at home agree with us.

These are the main things we found out about your school.

- You make good progress because you are taught well and sometimes teaching is excellent.
- You are very well looked after and cared for, and so gain the confidence you need to succeed.
- Adults plan really exciting visits, which we know you enjoy, and invite lots of interesting visitors to come in and work with you. These make learning even more fun. We saw some very keen gardeners when we came to visit.
- The headteacher and her staff lead and manage well.

This is how we thought the school should get even better.

- If teachers all use the same system to record how well you are getting on.
- If senior teachers check what is happening in the school more and share the good practice.
- If the governors know how well you are doing in your learning.

With every good wish for the future and thank you once again for your help with this inspection.

Yours sincerely

Liz Bull

Lead inspector

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