

Penkford School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104843
Local Authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	355640
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Linda Clare

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	9–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	51
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr Peter Astbury
Headteacher	Mr David King
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Ten lessons were observed involving nine teachers and two higher level teaching assistants. Meetings were held with governors, parents and carers, groups of students and partners from other organisations. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documents including data on students' progress, teachers' planning, curriculum documents, students' files, the school's self-evaluation and five questionnaires from parents and carers. A visit to the school's off-site provision 'Building Futures' was also made as part of the inspection.

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

- The challenge presented by targets set for students in core subject areas.
- Whether the school's provision effectively meets the needs of those with the most challenging difficulties.
- How well the school monitors its work and makes improvements as a result.
- The impact of the school's specialist status on students' attendance and progress.

Information about the school

Penkford School is a special school catering for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many have additional needs including specific learning difficulties. All students have a statement of special educational needs and currently boys substantially outnumber girls. All students are from a White British background and come from the wider St Helens area. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above national average. A small number are looked after by a local authority. The school has responsibility for an off-site vocational training unit. The school has achieved numerous awards including Sportsmark, BECTA ICT Mark and has Dyslexia Friendly status. Penkford was re-designated for specialist status in September 2010 for Special Educational Needs: Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, and has achieved Financial Management Systems in School.

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

Penkford is a good school that provides outstanding care, guidance and support for its students and is clearly driven by its goal to achieve 'success every day'. Parents and carers are fulsome in their praise that the school will 'go the extra mile' to ensure the individual needs and interests of their children are well met, and they appreciate the friendly atmosphere and warm welcome they receive.

The school is developing good nurturing practice which supports younger students well. Peer support and the development of trust are promoted throughout the school. Students say they like school and are happy there. They learn to overcome often very challenging difficulties in its calm environment. Students value the support of their individual staff mentors and make good progress in their personal and social development. They say they feel safe, listened to and are helped to resolve any issues. This helps them to become more receptive to learning and as a result progress is good or better. Students achieve well from their starting points and attainment by Year 11 is broadly average.

Teaching is generally good and lessons are well planned with maximum practical content to encourage active participation in learning. Expected learning and behaviour outcomes for individual students are not always clearly provided in each lesson. The curriculum is well matched to students' age and ability. It is themed for younger students and correctly leads to personalised pathway choices for older students progressing to national awards. Positive relationships promote generally good behaviour and students are encouraged to make choices. However, students are provided with few opportunities to take on responsibility for leading collaboration or to constructively take the initiative. Attendance is satisfactory and rapidly rising. This is due to the excellent care and support provided by the school and enrichment activities, such as learning to be a dee-jay' and horse-riding.

The headteacher, senior leaders and governing body have a clear sense of direction and high expectations for the school's future development. Development planning has well identified priorities. Self-evaluation is good and the school has an accurate view of its strengths and knows which areas it needs to develop. Safeguarding procedures are good. Outstanding partnerships with local businesses contribute effectively to students' good and better understanding of work-related skills. The school's vocational centre is very effective in spearheading the school's expanding specialist work and has had a tremendous impact on opportunities available for students both at Penkford and from the wider community. Much has been achieved since the last inspection demonstrating the school's good capacity to improve further.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers make students aware of the specific behaviour and learning outcomes in every lesson.
- Promote more opportunities for students to improve their collaborative and interpersonal skills by learning to:
 - – take and accept responsibility in a range of situations
 - – make greater contribution to the development of the school and links with other communities.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students achieve well academically and make good progress in their personal and social development. Many students recognise that Penkford provides them with an opportunity to start again.

Focused learning programmes ensure that students make good and, for some, outstanding progress in closing the gap from their generally below-average and sometimes low starting points on entry. This has resulted this year in a majority of students achieving between 4 and 7 GCSE passes, plus Entry level qualifications and vocational awards. All gain English and mathematics accreditation at levels appropriate to their ability. In mathematics a large majority gain GCSE passes in Year 11 and last year, six students achieved pass grades in Year 10. Although students enter with much lower levels in English, they make good progress and the school ensures that they leave with a qualification appropriate to ability from GCSE to functional skills and adult literacy options. Those on link courses at 'Building Futures' enjoy the interaction they have with students from other schools and develop good understanding of work-place safety and construction skills. They achieve outstanding success in their Foundation Certificates in Building Craft Occupations (FCBCO). The school's monitoring and observations of lessons shows that students to be on track for a greater number of passes at higher levels next year.

The good relationships they establish with staff helps support a sense of security and promotes improved engagement with learning. This was clearly illustrated in the concentration and great pride shown as students worked on design projects of bird-boxes and working hovercraft models. Also the maturity with which they repeated complicated 'flips' in gymnastics having studied techniques they had recorded in earlier performances. Students demonstrate good information and communication technology skills and learn to use specialised equipment in design technology and science apparatus safely. Targeted support ensures that students with additional and specific needs make good progress. Girls achieve higher levels than boys which reflect their higher ability on entry. Students looked after by a local authority achieve at the same or higher levels as their peers.

Students understand what it means to live a healthy lifestyle and many choose sport-related activities as their reward for success in maintaining positive behaviour. Their attitude to learning is generally good; they develop a greater willingness to listen to the views of others and learn to manage their own behaviour more appropriately. The school council enables some students to contribute to the school's life and development, although additional opportunities to do this are limited. Their cultural awareness is promoted well through themed work such as aboriginal art and planned visits to places, such as the

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slavery museum. The extensive vocational programme provides excellent opportunities for students to work alongside a range of work companions from different backgrounds.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

High staffing ratios and effective classroom support promote students' progress effectively. Behaviour is generally managed well and any issues which arise are dealt with calmly and with praise for positive response. Personal development profiles, piloted in the nurture groups are being extended to older groups, building on good practice. Clear lesson objectives are set for classes; however, not all students know the individual learning and behavioural outcomes expected of them each lesson. A behaviour reward system, exchanging acorns for positive self-assessment supports the behaviour of younger students.

Good use is made of questioning and encouragement in most lessons. In a mathematics lesson on probability, football colours were chosen to record 'chances' on random interactive spins of a wheel. Through supporting their 'team', the task held attention and the probability of successive turns falling to each colour/team was understood very well. Through this level of attention to learning styles, students engage more in their lessons and make good progress in grasping the concepts taught.

Flexibility is a feature of a curriculum which accommodates students' interests well.

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Focused sessions effectively support those with specific learning needs and an appropriate emphasis on the social use of language permeates lessons. All students benefit from social and emotional literacy programmes and effective personal, social and health lessons include therapy sessions. Students choose one of three pathways for Key Stage 4. These balance academic qualifications with vocational, college and work-related learning very well. The school offers an impressive range of GCSE subjects and ensures that entry level units provide interim success to motivate students and keep them on track. Students enjoy their residential experiences in Conway, and take part in organised sporting activities whenever possible.

Pastoral arrangements are strong. The extensive range of services, support workers and interventions are very well managed and offer outstanding provision. Transition arrangements are thorough and effective. Attendance is monitored closely and staff visit parents and carers at home regularly. Easter and summer schools extend students' social learning well. The school has successfully established alternative and innovative ways to motivate and engage students who find traditional schooling difficult and as a result, attendance is rising rapidly. The successes students achieve encourage a high proportion to go on to further education, training and supported apprenticeships.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides calm, confident leadership and has built a strong senior management team who effectively oversee key aspects of the school's functioning. The ethos of the school is positive and forward-looking. Morale is good, and staff teamwork strengthens classroom practice. Subject leaders are developing their roles as middle managers well. Subject evaluations are thorough, provide direction, and contribute significantly to raising standards in teaching and learning across the school. Assessment to support students' learning, recently revitalised by the introduction of a web-based system, has enabled more effective tracking and is embedding securely. Target-setting is realistic, presents a good level of challenge and is appropriately set against progression indicators and national qualifications. Governors visit regularly and monitor progress well; the governing body has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Partnerships with employers, colleges and a wide range of medical, social, legal and justice services enhance provision very well. The school tackles equality of opportunity well and is proactive in identifying those for whom additional measures and support are needed. For example, virtual courses off-site at the vocational unit re-engage the hardest to reach students, one of whom achieved GCSE mathematics last year as a result.

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Safeguarding procedures, including those for child protection and risk assessment are good.

Through its specialism, partnerships with other schools and local community groups have been developed which help to promote community cohesion in the immediate area. The school is aware that this does not yet extend sufficiently to the wider community, but through the curriculum and work-based learning is starting to prepare pupils for life in a multi-cultural society.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

A small number of parents and carers responded to the Ofsted questionnaire. However, those who did responded very positively about Penkford School. They feel well informed about their child's progress and value letters indicating good work or behaviour, sent home throughout the term. Parents and carers particularly appreciate the care students receive and the support provided for those who find it difficult to engage with traditional schooling. As one parent commented 'school must be credited with enabling my son to continue his education elsewhere' referring to the work of the school's popular off-site vocational extension centre. Inspection evidence also supports these views as many of the outcomes for learners were found to be good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Penkford 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 5 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 51 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	1	20	2	40	1	20	1	20
The school keeps my child safe	4	80	1	20	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	5	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	2	40	3	60	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	3	60	2	40	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	1	20	3	60	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	1	20	4	80	0	0	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)	3	60	1	20	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	3	60	2	40	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	4	80	1	20	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	2	40	3	60	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	4	80	1	20	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	3	60	2	40	0	0	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	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). 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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



1 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Penkford School, Newton-le-Willows, WA12 9XZ

I am writing to thank you for helping the inspection team come to their judgements about your school last week. We were very impressed with your honesty and frank views about the school which were generally positive. We agree with you that Penkford is a good school, and so do your parents and carers.

All the adults in your school look after you extremely well. The nurture groups and staff and students mentoring systems are particularly effective in supporting you.

Your school provides a good quality of education. You make really good progress in your work and many of you achieve good results in relation to your starting points when you get to Year 11. This is because teaching is good and you enjoy most of your lessons. Your Pathway choices combine a good mix of academic qualifications, units of work and practical experience. Your school is extremely good at working with external partners. The courses at the 'Building Futures' centre extends your vocational skills well and provides you with a realistic view of working life.

The school is good because your headteacher and senior managers are good leaders and are constantly looking for ways to improve it. I have asked them to make sure that you always know what is expected of you by the end of each lesson in your individual learning and behaviour. I have also asked if more opportunities could be made available for you to take on more responsibility and contribute more to the development of the school than you do at the moment. You could help your teachers by letting them know if there are areas in which you could take more responsibility.

I am pleased that you have such a good school to go to. I hope that you take every advantage of the opportunities offered to you and wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Linda Clare

Lead inspector

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