

Pensby High School for Boys: A Specialist Sports College

Irby Road, Heswall, Wirral, Merseyside, CH61 6XN

Inspection dates

30 April–1 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that has serious weaknesses.

- Teaching over time has not been of sufficiently high quality to make sure that all students make good progress. Teaching has been particularly weak in English and science. As a result, students' achievement in these two key subjects is inadequate.
- More-able students are often given work that is too easy. They do not make the progress they ought to. Consequently, the proportion of students achieving the highest grades in examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 is well below average.
- Weak literacy skills cause some students' progress to flounder across a number of subjects.
- Students' behaviour requires improvement. Students start to misbehave when lessons are dull, preventing good learning and progress.
- In the past, school leaders have relied on a number of 'quick fixes' to improve results in examinations. There has been insufficient focus on tackling the underlying causes of underachievement, such as weak teaching. Therefore, there has been too little tangible improvement.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Attendance is low and there is too much variability in students' achievement across subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- Achievement in mathematics has risen markedly since the previous inspection. Strong leadership of this subject and good teaching are helping students to make increasingly good progress in mathematics.
- The Principal has a clear line of sight about what needs to be done to move the school forward. She has started to tackle underperformance and has quickly moved people on who were not up for the challenge. Her commitment to overturn a legacy of underachievement and provide a good education for the boys in the local community is unswerving.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 18 lessons, of which three were joint observations with members of the leadership team. An inspector also observed a small group of students reading.
- Inspectors examined detailed information on students' performance for the academic year 2011/12 and information provided by the school on current learning and progress.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff, groups of students and representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors took into account 16 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and considered 63 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspection team scrutinised a range of documentation including the school's records on behaviour and attendance, the monitoring of the quality of teaching and the school development plan.

Inspection team

Joan Bonenfant, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Derek Barnes	Additional Inspector
John Dunne	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Information about this school

- This is a much smaller than average-sized secondary school for boys, with a sixth form.
- The proportion of students eligible for support through the pupil premium is in line with the national average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, children of parents in the armed forces, and for students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is well below average, as is the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is above average.
- The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above average.
- No students attend work-related training away from school.
- The school meets the government's floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Pensby High School for Boys forms part of a hard federation with the neighbouring girls' school. Although the federation was formed in 2010, the Principal was not appointed until December 2011. She was formerly headteacher of the girls' school. The federation has one governing body. The majority of staff work across both schools.
- Sixth form provision is shared with the girls' school. In addition, the federation works in collaboration with a local secondary school to provide post-16 education.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the overall quality of teaching, particularly in English and science, so that all students make good or better progress by:
 - sharing existing good and outstanding practice more effectively
 - making sure all teachers plan lessons with activities that stimulate and engage learners, especially those who are capable of achieving the highest levels or grades
 - checking that all teachers are using the school marking policy effectively so that students get clear information on how to improve their work and that students are encouraged to respond to teachers' comments.
- Raise achievement in English and science by:
 - strengthening the quality of leadership in these subjects
 - regularly checking on students' progress in these subjects to make sure targets are being met and taking swift and effective action if they are not.
- Improve students' reading and writing skills by:
 - rigorously applying the whole school literacy policy so that students know exactly what they need to do to improve their reading and writing.
- Ensure students make good progress in all subjects in the sixth form by:
 - improving attendance

- setting individual targets for students that will help them to aim high and make at least good progress
- making sure that new monitoring procedures result in rapid and sustained improvement in the quality of teaching in the sixth form.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- In 2010 and 2011 students' attainment was broadly in line with the national average. However, in public examinations taken in 2012, the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, dropped considerably and was below the national average. This was largely because of poor student progress in English. Achievement in science was also inadequate in 2012. As a result of significant underperformance in these two key subjects achievement overall is inadequate.
- There have been many changes in staffing in English and the impact of this disruption is evident in poor examination results. Last year, only half the students who took the GCSE examination made the progress expected of them. According to information provided by the school during the inspection, the picture for students currently in Year 11 appears to be similar.
- Achievement in science remains a weakness. School leaders and the local authority have provided support for leadership and teaching in the department but improvements have been slow to take effect. As a result, only a small proportion of students are on track to meet their targets.
- Achievement in mathematics, on the other hand, is going from strength to strength. Last year, the proportion of students gaining a good grade in this subject at GCSE was slightly above the national average. Currently, almost three quarters of students in Year 11 are on target to make expected or better than expected progress in this subject.
- The policy to enter students early for the GCSE examination in mathematics has worked well; students are encouraged to have high expectations and to be proud of their success in achieving or exceeding their targets. Some students have also had the opportunity to achieve an additional qualification in further mathematics.
- Students' achievement in other subjects is not consistently good. Students achieve well in modern foreign languages and art, for example, but less well in humanities. Additionally, the proportion of students gaining A* and A grades in GCSE examinations is too low.
- The school has introduced small group lessons and extra support for students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium. This has worked well and the gap between these students and their peers is less than that found nationally. Students known to be eligible for free school meals are achieving half a grade behind other students in both English and mathematics. Nationally the gap is equivalent to one full grade. The school has also spent funds effectively on helping students with poor literacy skills in Year 7. As a result, most of these students have made good progress and are catching up with other students in the year group.
- The achievement of students with special educational needs requires improvement. Over time, this group of students has made progress that is in line with, and in some instances better than, their peers nationally. However, the progress of students with special educational needs currently in the school is mixed, with students in some year groups making good progress and others not.
- Procedures to promote literacy across subjects have recently been introduced. They are at the very early stages of development and have not had time to take effect. Weak writing skills are preventing some students expressing their ideas coherently. This is stopping some students from fulfilling their potential.
- Students make reasonable progress in the sixth form given their starting points. Outcomes in different subjects vary considerably from year to year. Improvements to the range of subjects on offer and arrangements to check up on the quality of teaching are only recently starting to have an impact. Students in the sixth form speak highly of the support they receive from their teachers.

The quality of teaching is inadequate

- Teaching in English and science has been inadequate over time, leading directly to students underachieving in these subjects. This was confirmed by lesson observations that took place during the inspection. Teaching was judged to be inadequate in half the English and science lessons that were visited during the inspection.
- Teaching in other subjects has not been of sufficiently high quality to ensure that all students make good progress. In the past, teachers have not expected enough of students. Lessons in general lack intellectual challenge for more-able students; this results in them underachieving across a range of subjects.
- Teachers do not always plan lessons that engage and stimulate students. In weaker lessons, activities lack appeal and students lose interest. In these lessons, low level disruption gets in the way of students' learning. Some teachers rely too heavily on the school's behaviour management system to sort out poor behaviour, instead of trying to capture students' imagination by planning varied and intriguing activities.
- The quality of marking and feedback to students is highly variable. Examples were seen of excellent marking with clear advice to students on how to improve their work. On the other hand, some work was marked carelessly with very little guidance given to students on how to achieve a better standard.
- Teaching in the sixth form requires improvement because teachers' expectations are not high enough. Teachers do not set students targets that offer sufficient challenge.
- Good and outstanding teaching is nevertheless evident in some subjects. For example, in one outstanding Year 11 history lesson, the teacher's probing questioning challenged students to think deeply about the topic, eliciting highly articulate and incisive responses on their part. Teaching in mathematics is of a consistently high quality, leading to students achieving well in this subject.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- Behaviour is improving but there is still work to be done. Training for staff in the management of poor behaviour has led directly to a marked reduction in the numbers of fixed term exclusions. There is now a clear system in place to deal with poor behaviour, when it occurs.
- Behaviour around the school is good on the whole. Students are polite and friendly, showing consideration for one another. Behaviour is good in lessons that are taught well, but it deteriorates rapidly when teaching is weak. The resulting low level disruption leads to underachievement in too many lessons.
- The majority of parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire feel that the school makes sure its students are well behaved, but a substantial minority do not agree with this point of view. A majority of staff feel that behaviour is good in the school.
- Students say that they feel safe in the school and this sentiment is echoed by a large majority of parents and carers. Students who met with inspectors expressed the view that their teachers prepare them well to deal with dangers they might meet in the outside world.
- Incidences of racism, bullying and the use of homophobic language are now carefully documented. School procedures have not always been rigorous enough in showing what action had been taken to support the victim and to prevent repetition by the offender. The school now takes a much firmer approach to dealing with such incidents. As a result, students say that there is little bullying and that when it occurs it gets sorted out by staff.
- School leaders have worked effectively to reduce absenteeism in the main school. Attendance is now broadly in line with the national average. This is not the case in the sixth form where attendance is low.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The Principal of the federation has a strong track record of driving improvement. She is determined to turn this school around, quickly identifying the main barriers to success. She has been unrelenting in tackling underperformance and the school is now in much better shape to go forward. However, she is aware that there is more to do to further improve achievement and teaching.
- Self-evaluation is over-generous, but school leaders have a very clear picture of where weaknesses remain. As a result, the school development plan is sharply focused on the correct priorities with measurable success criteria and clear timescales for improvement.
- Leaders in the English and science departments have not checked on students' progress rigorously enough. They have not stepped in to firmly tackle underachievement and as a result this has been allowed to continue for too long.
- Governors and school leaders decided to form a federation between this school and the neighbouring girls' school because of falling rolls. They demonstrate vision and ambition in wishing to harness expertise from the neighbouring school in order to improve the quality of education for boys in the local community. However, the process has been time-consuming, sapping the energy of staff and governors alike. This has led to school leaders sometimes 'taking their eye off the ball' regarding students' achievement.
- Leadership in the sixth form requires improvement because teaching quality has not been improved swiftly enough.
- The joint leadership and staffing structure arising from the federation with the neighbouring girls' school is starting to have a beneficial effect. There is a much sharper culture of accountability, low expectations are challenged and there is now a shared vision for improvement.
- The marked improvement in mathematics shows just what is possible and demonstrates the capacity for further improvement. In addition, school leaders have successfully tackled high rates of absence and have reduced exclusions.
- Through the programme to improve teaching, individuals get support that is tailored to their needs. Weak teachers are identified as being 'the wrong side of the line'; a clear message conveyed to staff is that only good teaching is good enough.
- School leaders are starting to improve teaching by harnessing the good practice that exists across the federation. Teachers across both schools who have a good record of accomplishment in ensuring students make good progress act as coaches and model good practice so that all teachers are clear what good teaching looks like. This initiative is at the early stages of development and has not had sufficient impact, particularly in English and science.
- Across the school students can choose from a wide range of subjects that meet their needs and interests. There is a wide range of after-school activities on offer that serve to enhance students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Students are encouraged to confront prejudice and try to see things from a different point of view. For example, during the inspection, students listened attentively in an assembly about how important it is to be tolerant and also to have sympathy for people less fortunate than oneself.
- Safeguarding procedures meet requirements.
- The local authority has provided considerable financial support to the school, but sometimes insufficient challenge. Local authority representatives have been very helpful in guiding the school during the process of becoming a federation. The local authority has set up productive links with local outstanding schools and is supporting the school in driving improvements in teaching and subject leadership.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body was re-constituted as a result of the two schools coming together as one federation. The new governing body demonstrates a passionate commitment to improving Pensby Boys' High School. In the past governors did not put sufficient pressure on school leaders, therefore the school has not improved quickly enough. Governors are dedicated and astute. They have willingly given up their time to attend a wide range of training courses,

including those run by the local authority. As a result, governors are now much more knowledgeable and confident in holding the school to account. They bring a wide range of expertise from the outside world that is beneficial to the school. Governors have invested considerable time in establishing the federation, to the detriment of their focus on students' achievement. Governors and school leaders use information about teachers' performance to decide whether teachers and school leaders should be paid more. The governing body has managed finances effectively and made sure that funds available for the pupil premium have been spent wisely, such as on additional staffing.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	105100
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	400755

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	475
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	102
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Draper
Headteacher	Pat Russell
Date of previous school inspection	30 September 2009
Telephone number	0151 342 0570
Fax number	0151 342 0571
Email address	schooloffice@psf.wirral.sch.uk

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