

Penn School

Church Road, Penn, Buckinghamshire, HP10 8LZ

Inspection dates

8–9 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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		Inadequate	4
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- Groups of students are underachieving. More able students are not challenged enough. Those with the most complex needs are not making enough progress.
- Teaching is inadequate. Lessons do not build on what students already know and challenge them to learn more. Too often activities and additional support from adults do not help students to learn. Behaviour requires improvement as some students do not participate actively in lessons.
- The school's information on students' progress is not accurate. Leaders cannot track whether students are making enough progress.
- Most students do well in the sixth form but the courses offered do not always build well enough on students' starting points. The sixth form requires improvement.
- The leaders' monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and of the residential experience are weak and do not lead to improvement.
- Actions so far to improve the quality of teaching and students' achievement have been too slow and ineffective.
- Important policies and procedures related to the residential provision are not implemented.
- The residential provision is not valued enough by leaders and governors. Accommodation is unsuitable and fails to provide for basics such as privacy.
- The school does not meet 20 of the national minimum standards for residential special schools.
- Senior leaders and governors do not have an accurate understanding of the extent of weaknesses in the school. They do not have a clear plan of how to bring about improvements. Staff and leaders are not accountable enough.

The school has the following strengths:

- Pupils feel safe at school. Students report that there is no bullying. They are confident staff will sort things out for them.
- The school's nurturing approach helps students who have been unhappy in other schools to settle well and begin to enjoy school life.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 lessons or parts of lessons. The majority of the observations were carried out with the heads of departments.
- Documents relating to the school and the residential provision were examined, including the school's self-evaluation summary, the school's improvement plan and policies, students' books and files, as well as minutes from meetings. Inspectors closely scrutinised documents related to child protection and safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire and to the online questionnaire (Parent View), where 46 responses were received. In addition, inspectors met with one parent and had email or telephone contact with two more.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and senior leaders, members of staff and members of the governing body. Inspectors met with groups of students, with the support of a British Sign Language interpreter when appropriate. The social care inspectors spent time with students in the residence in the evening and early morning. They also held a range of meetings with members of the care staff.
- Telephone conversations were held with three representatives of Buckinghamshire local authority.

Inspection team

Stephen McShane, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kate Robertson

Additional Inspector

Paula Lahey

Social Care Inspector

Sharron Escott

Social Care Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Information about this school

- Penn School is a non-maintained day and boarding school for students aged 11 -19 years with communication difficulties associated with hearing impairment, autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) or speech and language difficulties. The school comprises a sixth form, and speech and language, hearing impaired and ASD departments.
- The school offers boarding during the school week to 18 students. It provides on-site evening activities and opportunities to attend clubs in the local community.
- All students have statements of special educational needs. The school attracts students from a wide geographical area, although one third of students are from Buckinghamshire.
- A large majority of students are of White British heritage. Approximately a quarter of the students are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is slightly lower than the average nationally. As the school receives agreed fees from local authorities it does not receive pupil premium funding (the additional funding schools receive for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those who are in local authority care and those from service families).
- The Chair of the Governing Body took up the post in October 2012. The school has recently appointed two assistant headteachers.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it enables all students to make at least good progress, ensuring that:
 - lessons are planned to build on the prior learning of students
 - the intended learning outcomes of all lessons are clear and precise for individuals and groups
 - activities are purposeful and relevant
 - support from adults is always effective in improving learning and promoting students' independence
 - students are encouraged to be more active in lessons and take responsibility for their own learning.
- Improve students' achievement by:
 - ensuring that the assessment of students' current learning is accurate
 - setting challenging targets for students' progress based on their starting points and, where appropriate, according to national expectations
 - regularly monitoring progress to identify any underachievement and intervening when

necessary.

■ Strengthen leadership and management by:

- reviewing and clarifying roles, including establishing clear accountabilities for students' progress and for the quality of teaching and the residential provision
- ensuring leaders, including governors, have the necessary skills in order to carry out their roles and offering training where necessary
- sharpening monitoring and evaluation procedures so that leaders, including governors, have a clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the school
- developing school improvement plans that have measurable outcomes and clear timescales and carrying out actions agreed.

■ An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

■ The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools.

- The school identifies at least one person other than a parent or carer, outside the residential and teaching staff, who children may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school. The school ensures that children know who this person is, and how to contact them. Children are also provided with one or more appropriate helpline(s) or outside contact numbers, including the Children's Rights Director, to ring in case of problems or distress (NMS 2.2)
- Suitable living accommodation is provided for the purposes of organised and private study outside school hours and for social purposes (NMS 5.2)
- Suitable toilet and washing facilities are provided for children, which are reasonably accessible from the sleeping accommodation. Separate toilet facilities are provided for boys and girls unless each toilet facility is provided in a separate room intended for use by one pupil at a time, the door to which is capable of being secured from inside. Toilet and washing facilities provide appropriate privacy for children (NMS 5.3)
- Residential accommodation is reserved for the use of those children designated to use it, and is protected from access by unauthorised persons. Any use of school facilities by individuals or groups does not allow members of the public (including members of organised groups using school facilities) substantial and unsupervised access to children, or to residential accommodation while occupied by children (NMS 5.7)
- The school has a written policy on compliance with relevant health and safety laws which is effectively implemented (NMS 6.1)
- The school premises, accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured (NMS 6.2)
- The school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards') (NMS 7.1)
- Reasonable protection is provided for children's personal possessions and for any children's money or valuables looked after by the school (NMS 9.3)
- Children have access to a range and choice of safe recreational areas, both indoors and outdoors, and there are safe areas at school where children can be alone if they wish (NMS 10.4)
- There is clear leadership and management of the practice and development of residential and care provision in the school, and effective links are made between academic and residential staff. The school's governing body or proprietor has a system to monitor care and welfare provision in the school (NMS 13.1)
- The records specified in Appendix 2 (Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards) are maintained and monitored by the school and action taken as appropriate

(NMS 13.3)

- Schools operate safe recruitment procedures and vet staff in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards') (NMS 14.1)
 - The school's procedures are compatible with the local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures applicable to the area where the school is located. Where children placed out of authority go missing, the Head of Care follows the local RMFHC protocol and complies with and makes staff aware of any other processes required by the placing authority (NMS 15.7)
 - Suitable accommodation (consisting of accommodation in which meals may be taken, living accommodation and sleeping accommodation) and suitable toilet and washing facilities are provided for residential staff. This accommodation is appropriately separated (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards') from the accommodation and facilities provided for children (NMS 15.13)
 - Children have an opportunity to contribute their views to the operation of residential provision, are able to raise concerns and make complaints, and their views are given appropriate weight in decisions about the running of the school. Children are not penalised for raising a concern or making a complaint in good faith (NMS 17.1)
 - The school has, and follows, an appropriate policy on responding to complaints that is compliant with the relevant regulatory requirements (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards') (NMS 18)
 - All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance (NMS 19.6)
 - Most monitoring visits are carried out unannounced. They include checks on: the school's records of attendance, complaints, sanctions, use of physical interventions, risk assessments, and where they exist, individual care plans for children; assessment of the physical condition of the building, furniture and equipment of the school; and also include opportunities for any child or member of staff who wishes to meet the visitor (in private if they wish) (NMS 20.2)
 - The headteacher (or school equivalent), governing body, trustees, partnership, or organisation responsible for the school carries out, and records in writing, once each year: a review of the operation and resourcing of the school's welfare provision for boarding pupils, in relation to its Statement of Purpose, its staffing policy, the placement plans for individual children; and an internal assessment of its compliance with these Standards. Where appropriate such a report may be incorporated within a review of the whole school (NMS 20.4)
 - The school produces a written placement plan, agreed as far as is practicable with the child, the child's parents or carers and any placing authority for the child, unless the information is held elsewhere such as in the child's statement of special educational needs. The placement plan identifies the needs of that child that the school should meet and specifies how the school will care for the child and promote their welfare on a day-to-day basis. Where significant changes are made to the placement plan there is appropriate consultation. Where applicable the plan is consistent with the care plan of the placing authority for any child placed by a local authority. The placement plan is regularly reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect significant changes in the child's needs or progress in his or her development. Where feasible, children in the school are aware of the content of their placement plans, and confirm that the school is providing care for them that is consistent with the plans (NMS 21.1)
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Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Progress of students in literacy and communication, mathematics, science and information and communication technology is extremely variable across the school and is inadequate overall. The school's assessment information is not accurate. It is not possible to be sure what progress students have made over time. Recent school data show considerable variations in performance in different subjects and departments.
- There is evidence of underachievement by students in the hearing impaired department and the speech and language department in the last two terms. Yearly testing of students with ASD shows very few make progress in reading or mathematics. Those few students who entered the school with attainment that was broadly average at the end of Year 6 had not made expected progress when they left Year 11.
- Students attain a range of accreditations ranging from GCSE art, Entry Level qualifications in English, mathematics and science and awards in life and living. The majority of students leave to study courses at college in their home areas. Although there are opportunities to follow a variety of courses at Penn and at their partner colleges, these qualifications are not securely matched to students' starting points so they do not consistently lead to students making enough progress.
- Learning in lessons is uneven. In too many lessons there is little progress as students do not build on their previous knowledge. They frequently complete tasks with the help of support staff but learning is minimal. Too often, more-able students become bored as they are not challenged and those with more complex needs learn little. In a few lessons, such as art and physical education, students are learning well. In art lessons, for example, students are enthused to produce work using a variety of media and talk knowledgeably about different artists and their inspirations.
- Evidence in books confirms the variability of learning through the school. In the sixth form, students complete work well, in accordance with the requirements of their modules. Other students' books and files show that students are not making progress or building on previous learning sufficiently.
- It is clear that a number of students have become more confident in learning due to the small classes and nurturing approach in school and the boarding provision. This is evident in the way that they will attempt tasks, for example, reading aloud or using information and communication technology and joining in with activities at the local youth club. However, as the quality of teaching, challenge and support for individuals is inconsistent, they do not build sufficiently on the skills and confidence that they acquire.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- In too many lessons, even though class sizes are very small, there are individuals or groups who are making little or no progress. Too often, even though students are of different abilities in the class, they all do the same work. This means the more able are not challenged enough and those less able need extra support.
- Although teachers' planning is detailed, it does not describe the intended learning of individuals and groups well enough. This means that explanations and activities are not planned sufficiently well to enable students to build on what they have learned before. At times, they complete tasks that are irrelevant.
- Teaching is not matched to the specific needs of students well enough. All students have language needs, yet in too many lessons there is too much adult talk that is imprecise and unstructured. Teachers' questions are not targeted at particular students and become random and unfocused. The questions do not check or deepen learning sufficiently. An over-reliance on 'hands-up' when answering questions or asking for quick responses means that students do not have the appropriate time to consider and practise their responses. Too often adults intervene

and talk for students. Too often the pace is too quick or too slow to be responsive to the memory or processing difficulties of students.

- The use of specialist interventions to assist individual students varies in quality across the school. Interpreters ensure students who are deaf or hearing impaired have access to the lesson. They explain things well and are effective. In some lessons key words are highlighted and focused upon to extend vocabulary. However, in other lessons, when students need help to understand the language or the context, there is little attention given to providing the particular resources, visual aids or language support that would aid learning.
- There is a high student-to-staff ratio in all classes. There are many situations when a student receives one-to-one support that is very kind and reassuring. This gives confidence and means that help is always on hand. However, there are too many occasions when adults intervene too quickly and impede students' independent learning.
- Teaching in the sixth form has strengths. Because teachers' expectations for what students should achieve are clear, the students work industriously with enthusiasm and interest to try to do as well as they can.
- The majority of teachers aim to capture the interest of students through interesting subject matter, for example, problem-solving in mathematics, the history of genocide in Rwanda and the effectiveness of different advertisements. However, even in these lessons, students are engaged but not making consistently good progress because what they are intended to learn has not been clearly specified.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

- Students are polite and welcoming. They are eager to communicate, make their views known and make visitors welcome, even though they find communication challenging.
- Students are willing to follow instructions in the classroom and to complete work. In lessons, however, often because help is at hand, they become too reliant on adults and stop working if they do not have direct supervision.
- The caring, nurturing environment that the school provides means that students feel safe. Students who had unhappy experiences at previous schools are now enjoying school and like being in a small class. Individuals who previously exhibited challenging behaviour receive help from a range of professionals and improve. This means that violent episodes decrease. Students with complex medical needs receive confident and appropriate care so that they feel safe.
- Students are kind to each other. They respond to each other's needs and are supportive..
- Although there is detailed record keeping of behaviour, this is not yet monitored or evaluated consistently enough to ensure that students are making enough progress in their personal development.

The leadership and management

are inadequate

- There is no current or accurate self-evaluation which means that leaders, including governors, do not have a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. A recent externally commissioned review raised some issues but actions have not been taken quickly enough to rectify them. Senior managers are aware of some deficiencies in their different departments but have not brought these together so that a coherent plan of improvement can be agreed and implemented. Arrangements for managing the performance of staff are weak. The observation of teaching and subsequent follow-up are not robust enough to bring about improvements in quality.
- The lack of secure information about students' progress means that the leaders do not know if students are making progress or not. Data are not compared with national information. There is no whole-school agreement on the appropriate challenge or targets for students at different

levels. The need for improvement in progress data and assessment was a key recommendation from the previous education inspection in 2010. There are recent plans and improvements but this issue has not been addressed quickly enough.

- The school does not have accurate information relating to the progress of different groups, even though it is apparent that more-able students and those with more complex needs, in particular, are not learning enough. Leaders are not taking effective action to address underachievement or close gaps in achievement and are, therefore, not securing equal opportunities.
- Child protection policies are appropriate and staff training is up to date. The school has a good relationship with the local safeguarding board. There are some lapses in recruitment procedures and references and gaps in employment are not always followed up. There are also deficiencies in aspects of health and safety. Leaders are not rigorous enough in monitoring the school, the residential accommodation and the grounds and maintaining high, safe standards. This means that potential hazards go unchecked. In these areas the school is failing to meet the national minimum standards (NMS).
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Sixth-form students are offered additional opportunities to attend local colleges. There is appropriate communication and on-going support for students who attend. There is a varied programme of work experience that students enjoy. The school's personal, social and health education programme and 'emotions' programme ensure that students have a growing awareness of social relationships and their own behaviour. Race, culture, gender and disability issues are explored by students. Visitors to the school and regular educational visits widen students' experiences of the local and international world.
- Buckinghamshire local authority takes the lead role on behalf of other local authorities in monitoring the school, which it carries out through an annual visit. The local authority has a good working relationship with the school and is currently carrying out improvements to its monitoring procedures of all provision to ensure they are more robust. The school currently accesses appropriate support from the local authority for newly qualified teachers and for protecting children.
- Most parents and carers who completed Parent View feel that their children are happy and they are pleased with the teaching and progress. A few parents and carers expressed their dissatisfaction to inspectors about the quality of education and the lack of progress of their children. Inspectors agree that all students are not making sufficient progress and the quality of teaching is inadequate.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors recognise that they do not have the necessary skills, knowledge or information to support and challenge the school's leaders effectively, although they are very committed to the school and want to do their best. Recently they have bought additional support from the local authority and attended more training to. They do not currently have accurate information on the students' progress or the quality of the school and residential provision. Arrangements to manage and measure staff performance are weak in the school and residential provision. Leaders and teachers who are paid additional monies are not held sufficiently accountable for the quality and impact of their work.

Outcomes for residential pupils	are adequate
Quality of residential provision and care	is inadequate
Residential pupils' safety	is inadequate
Leadership and management of the residential provision	is inadequate

- Residential students enjoy boarding at the school. They benefit from opportunities to socialise with their friends and to join in community activities. Residential students make progress with

social interaction and communication skills, which promotes their personal development. Students demonstrate care and tolerance of and empathy with one another. The lack of resources in the residential provision restricts students' opportunities to complete homework tasks and acquire life skills, and impedes progress.

- Relationships between residential students and staff are warm and trusting. Students receive sound pastoral support. As a result, they feel confident that adults will care for them and say they can communicate any worries or concerns openly.
- Boarding is not valued as an important aspect of the school provision. This is evident in the living environment provided. The general furnishings and fittings are dated and in need of replacement.
- There is insufficient separation of residential accommodation from the education provision. Classrooms are located in unused bedrooms. This means that living accommodation is not reserved for the use of residential students only. Residential students' privacy is not fully protected. Some students say they are not provided with lockable storage facilities and not all bathrooms can be locked from the inside.
- Residential students are supported to make decisions and about their choice of food, how to decorate their bedrooms and whether they join in with the activities on offer. However, their views on the quality of residential provision and care they receive are not sought well enough. As a result, residential students have insufficient opportunity to contribute to the development and running of the residential provision.
- Residential students have access to independent visitors and can share concerns or complaints with a range of staff. However, they are not provided with correct, current information to make complaints to inspectorates or given contact details for the Children's Rights Director.
- Residential students' safety is not adequately ensured as health and safety, fire safety and staff recruitment policies are not implemented effectively
- Case files do not adequately reflect the full knowledge care staff have of students' needs. Care plans and associated risk assessments are not up to date and are inadequate. They do not reflect students' current complex needs and individual circumstances or provide comprehensive guidance on how needs will be met and risks reduced. This places students at risk.
- The leadership and management of the residential provision are inadequate. Accountabilities and responsibilities are not clear and, as a result, leaders have failed to drive forward necessary improvements and developments. Internal monitoring of risk assessments, care plans, health and safety records, recruitment records and the environment are not effective. Self-evaluation is limited and inaccurate. Care staff are not provided with regular supervision or performance management.

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>

Boarding/Residential provision		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	133586
Social care unique reference number	SC042644
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	422927

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	92
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	40
Number of boarders on roll	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Norma Wallace
Headteacher	Mary Nest-Richardson
Date of previous school inspection	6 October 2010
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