

Penn School

Church Road, Penn, High Wycombe, HP10 8LZ

Inspection dates 6–7 May 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Leaders and governors have not ensured that the record of staff employment checks is free from minor omissions. Governors have not ensured that the school website contains all the required information.
- Parents find that communication with staff is difficult at times.
- Governors do not have sufficient skills to check thoroughly the information on students' achievement so that they are confident in challenging leaders and holding them to account.
- Teaching requires improvement because not enough students make the progress they are capable of.
- Questioning in lessons does not regularly check students' grasp of their learning. It provides too few opportunities for the most able students to deepen their knowledge and understanding.
- School leaders have not improved the quality of teachers' marking so that students have clear advice on how to improve their work. Support staff are not always effective in helping students to make the progress they should.
- Some students are over-reliant on adults to support their learning.
- The sixth form provision requires improvement because students do not make consistently good progress.

The school has the following strengths

- Students' behaviour is good, both in classrooms and around the school. Students feel safe and get on well with each other and staff.
- Leaders are working well with staff to improve the quality of teaching and speed up students' progress.
- Therapists make a strong contribution to improving students' speech and language skills.
- All students go on to further or residential education, training or apprenticeships. Through good personal development, students learn how to appreciate beliefs and cultures of other people so they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Many parents are positive about the school and its work in helping students to lead worthwhile and fulfilling lives.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students' learning in 13 lessons or parts of lessons, all jointly with school leaders.
- Meetings were held with three governors and a trustee, and school staff. The lead inspector also held a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents. These included the school's information on students' progress, planning and monitoring documentation, the school improvement plans and the self-evaluation summary. Inspectors also reviewed safeguarding policies, records of checks on the suitability of staff and other adults, and behaviour and attendance records.
- Inspectors took account of the 28 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). In addition, inspectors took account of the 36 responses to a questionnaire for members of staff.
- Inspectors talked to students about the school's work and listened to some students reading in class.
- When the school was inspected in May 2013, it was judged to require special measures. Subsequently, the school received five monitoring visits. On the occasion of this section 5 inspection, the school was no longer deemed to require special measures.

Inspection team

David Scott, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Debby McCarthy

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- Penn is a non-maintained special school for young people with communication difficulties associated with hearing impairment, autistic spectrum conditions and speech and language difficulties. Around a half of the students are in the sixth form.
- Half of all students have speech and language difficulties and a quarter have autistic spectrum conditions. The remaining quarter have hearing impairment. Around half of all students have complex conditions involving more than one area.
- Students are referred to the school from 20 different local authorities.
- All but three students have a statement of special educational needs or education health care plans. Over two thirds of the students are boys.
- The proportions of students from a range of ethnic minority heritages and at the early stages of learning English are just above average. Just over two thirds of students are of White British heritage.
- Just over one in 10 students are eligible for additional government funding, known as the pupil premium. This proportion is below average. The funding is used to support students who are eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority. However, two thirds of eligible students do not receive funding currently.
- Just under one in five students across the school is involved with the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as a result of their behavioural needs.
- Sixth form students attend off-site training at Amersham and Wycombe College to study a range of worked-related courses, Berkshire College of Agriculture for land-based studies, Merton College for construction, and SKIDZ for motor vehicle maintenance.
- The school does not enter students early for examinations.
- Since the school was placed in special measures, there has been around a 20% turnover in staff.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that students, including those in the sixth form, make good progress by ensuring:
 - teachers provide students with clearer advice, in small steps, on how to improve their work and provide more opportunities to act on this advice
 - teaching assistants are deployed more effectively to support students' learning
 - teachers' questioning is sufficiently thorough to deepen students' knowledge and understanding, particularly for the most able
 - students are not over-reliant on adults to support their learning.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring:
 - the single central record of staff employment checks is regularly updated and contains all the required information
 - senior and middle leaders strengthen their monitoring and coaching of teaching to improve the quality of teaching
 - channels of communication with parents are strengthened and parents' queries are answered promptly
 - governors are given the skills and confidence to analyse school data and are provided with clear information about students' achievement and staff performance, so that they can challenge leaders more effectively
 - the school's website contains all the required information.

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

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Since the last inspection, the school has been through many changes. A falling student roll, together with a high turnover of staff, has put strains on the school's effectiveness and increased the pressure on the leadership and the financial stability of the school.
- Over the last two years, nine senior and middle leaders have been appointed. They were either new to the school or to their responsibilities. The new senior team works together well. The members have received considerable support from external consultants and, as a result, measures to improve the quality of teaching and speed up students' progress are beginning to work and gather speed. They have created a platform upon which teaching and behaviour can improve. However, it is too early to judge the full impact of their work.
- Through regular monitoring and coaching of teaching, senior and middle leaders know well the school's strengths and areas still to be improved. However, some judgements about the school's current performance are over generous. Also, leaders have not yet made the best use of the staff training and development programme to ensure teaching is consistently good and students achieve well. This is why leadership and management are not good.
- Middle leaders are increasingly effective in monitoring their areas of responsibility. Since the last inspection they have made some improvements in the quality of marking. This has been achieved through carrying out regular checks on the work completed by every student in all subjects.
- The majority of staff who returned the questionnaire were positive about the work of the school. However, a minority expressed concerns about a range of issues surrounding the leadership of the school and opportunities for staff development.
- The very small amount of additional government funding is used well, in particular for therapists to support students' communication needs. Leaders can demonstrate that these students make similar progress to their peers in the school.
- Many parents who submitted their views to the Ofsted online questionnaire would recommend the school to other parents. However, around a third of these parents expressed concerns over the leadership of the school and the effectiveness of communication between staff and parents. These concerns were also reflected in the two complaints received by the inspection team from parents. Inspectors found some evidence to support these concerns. Communication between staff and parents is not effective.
- Leaders and governors have improved arrangements for managing staff performance. However, currently, arrangements are not linked to pay awards. Discussions have recently taken place to rectify this.
- Effective arrangements are in place for monitoring the attendance, behaviour and progress of students who attend off-site training. Staff accompany students to the different venues to ensure they are settled and enjoy their learning.
- Since September 2014, a new system to track students' academic progress has been introduced. The information that it provides is used increasingly well to ensure students get back on track if they fall behind.
- By encouraging positive behaviour based on respect, leaders have established a well-ordered school that has been effective at promoting equality and ensuring that discrimination is not tolerated.
- Leaders have ensured that an appropriate range of courses is provided. The courses are designed to meet students' needs and enthusiasms. Students have many opportunities to develop skills to enable them to express their feelings and emotions in a positive way. Through these, and taking part in interesting activities, students are prepared well for life in modern Britain. They gain an understanding of democracy and the rule of law, and an appreciation of British values.
- Older students receive helpful careers advice which helps them make well informed decisions about their future options.
- Students' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is promoted well. Through assemblies and visits to places of worship, students have many opportunities to learn about the views and beliefs of people with traditions different from their own. Through the personal development programmes, they are able to learn how to get along with each other and to become more independent.
- The school has bought in helpful advice from external consultants and the local authority to improve the quality of teaching and speed up students' progress.
- At the beginning of the inspection, the school's updated safeguarding policy, reflecting the most recent guidance, was not available on the school's website. However, by the end of the day this had been

rectified. Also, although checks on the suitability of staff to work with children had been carried out, not all have been recorded on the single central record of staff employment checks and, as such, although requirements are not fully met, they do not give cause for concern for students' safety.

- The school has the capacity to improve because senior and middle leaders are working well together to tackle weaknesses more effectively to enable the school to move forward.

■ The governance of the school:

- Although governors have received regular training in safeguarding and child protection, they have not ensured that the single central record of staff employment checks is regularly updated and contains all the required information, but do not give cause for concern for students' safety.
- Furthermore, they have not ensured that the school's website contains all the required information. As a result of these shortcomings, governance requires improvement.
- Governors are passionate about the school, and are determined that it should improve. The recently formed teaching and learning committee is enabling members to have an increasingly effective understanding of the quality of teaching. Governors are attached to individual departments and report back their findings to the governing body, but only a few visits have taken place.
- During this year, governors have received a good level of information about students' performance. However, governors are not confident in analysing this information because it is often very bulky and highly complex. Further training in analysing data is required to enable governors to see how well the school is performing when compared to similar schools and to feel more confident in posing challenging questions to hold senior leaders to account.
- Governors have ensured that increasingly effective arrangements for managing the performance of staff are in place. They are now receiving more detailed information about how performance is rewarded, and how under performance is tackled.
- The governing body faces a constant challenge in balancing the school's finances against a backdrop of decreasing income arising from a fall in the number of students on roll. However, they are managing a variety of ways to increase and maximise the sources of funding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students display positive attitudes to learning and behave well in lessons and around the school site. At lunchtimes, they develop their independence skills by clearing away their plates and cutlery. At home time, they wait patiently for their taxis.
- Students reported that they enjoy school. Their attendance is similar to that in special schools nationally. Exclusions have reduced over the last two years and there have only been two this year.
- The behaviour team has reduced dramatically the number of incidents of poor behaviour. This team, supported by the visiting nurse, has helped students to develop ways to express their feelings and explain their needs in a positive way.
- Conversations with students showed them to be kind, courteous, respectful and caring towards each other, staff and visitors. This was demonstrated by the confidence they expressed about their futures and the maturity they showed when speaking with strangers.
- For students who attend offsite training, effective arrangements are in place for checking their attendance, punctuality and behaviour.
- Most parents and carers agreed that the school does a good job in promoting students' good behaviour in order to lead worthwhile and fulfilling lives. The large majority of staff agree. Behaviour is not outstanding because some students are over reliant on adults to support their learning.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure requires improvement. It is not good because the recording of checks on staff suitability to work with children is not complete, and so statutory requirements are not fully met, but do not give cause for concern for students' safety.
- At Penn, students are well cared for, a view that is shared by parents, carers and staff. Therapeutic and nursing services make a strong contribution to students' well-being, and enable students to make good progress in their speech and language skills.
- Students confirm they feel safe on the school site. Those who spoke to inspectors reported that there is virtually no bullying and that any concerns are followed up quickly.

- Students know how to stay safe online and the potential risks of social media. Internet usage is monitored carefully and regularly updated security devices ensure students only access the sites they should. They have a good understanding of how to stay safe outdoors so that they can move around independently and use public transport. For example, during the inspection, one student checked the identity badge of one of the inspectors.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is too variable and requires improvement. Although there are some pockets of good teaching, not enough over time has been good or better to ensure all students achieve well.
- As a result of some weak teaching and high staff turnover since the last inspection, students have not made good progress. However, over the last year, staffing has begun to stabilise. Teaching has been monitored more regularly and is becoming more consistent in quality. As a result, students are making steady progress, which is beginning to speed up.
- Marking is regular and has improved since the last inspection. Students receive positive comments which help to improve their confidence and self-esteem. However, not all teachers provide students with clear advice on how to improve their work, nor enough opportunities for them to act on advice.
- The school has had a strong focus on improving students' reading, communication and numeracy skills by adopting commercial schemes, implementing a new marking policy and carrying out careful checks on students' work. In addition, each student is provided with an individual 'learning passport' which records his or her targets across a range of subjects, and is referred to regularly in lessons. As a result, students make good progress in their communication skills.
- Teachers' questioning is not sufficiently thorough to deepen students' knowledge and understanding, so that they make the progress they are capable of, particularly for most able.
- Students enjoy positive relationships with each other and staff. They are keen to learn and, as a result of better teaching this year, incidents of poor behaviour have reduced markedly.
- Teachers and teaching assistants provide an appropriate range of activities to capture students' interest and enthusiasm. However, teaching assistants are not always deployed in a way that helps students to maximise their learning and make consistently good progress. Some provide too little support, whilst others provide too much.
- Attractive and stimulating displays around the school and in classrooms support learning well.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The school was unable to present reliable data for the academic year 2013–14. This was because leaders recognised that the previous system was not fit for its purpose. So, throughout 2013–14, they investigated the most suitable available options that would show students' achievement more accurately, and would enable staff to make better use of the data.
- In September 2014, the school introduced a new data tracking system, which is working well. The school's information for the first two terms of this academic year shows that, overall, current students are making expected progress in English and mathematics. They make slightly faster progress in English than they do in mathematics. However, although the provision increasingly meets students' special needs, it is not enabling them to make the progress they are capable of.
- Although the tracking and analysis of the progress of students who attend off-site training are not recorded in the school's main performance document, they are recorded separately. Monitoring information shows that students make increasingly steady progress in their learning, attend regularly, behave well and are aware of how to keep themselves safe when out of school.
- Students follow three distinct 'pathways', based on their prior skills and complexity of need. They perform similarly and make increasingly steady progress on each of the three programmes.
- The relatively small numbers in some years and groups of students mean that data need to be interpreted with care. However, analysis of the larger groups indicates that boys and girls now make similar progress, as do those from different ethnic backgrounds and those new to learning English.
- The proportion of eligible students who actually receive the additional funding they are entitled to is very small. However, analysis of individual performance indicates that these students make steady progress, similar to that of their classmates.
- All students who left the sixth form last summer went on to colleges of further education, apprenticeships

and residential colleges.

- Students who attend off-site training make positive gains in their personal development, skills, confidence and self-esteem.
- As a result of effective support and practice in coping with the demands of examinations, the most able students make increasingly steady progress in some subjects. For example, over the last two years, students achieved high quality GCSE grades in art, English, mathematics and science, with one student achieving an A* in art. Students also achieve well in physical education. However, the most able students do not make the progress they are capable of in all subjects because teaching does not deepen their knowledge and understanding.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- The sixth form is led by a team of staff that also has responsibilities in the main school. As a result, the impact of leadership and management is the same as identified in the main school.
- Teaching requires improvement. Although some teaching ensures students make good progress, overall it is too variable. There is a growing expectation that students will have more opportunities to discuss their learning with each other and solve problems for themselves. However, at times, expectations are not high enough so that students are not challenged to achieve as well as they should, particularly the most able. As a result, the students do not make good progress.
- As in the main school, there are no reliable data available for 2013–14. Nevertheless, staff have made a good start in adapting the school's new system to track students' individual progress. Also, due to gaps in information about students' previous achievement, targets are sometimes not challenging enough. As a result, students' progress is slower than it should be.
- Students behave well and have positive attitudes to learning. They feel safe and are keen to support younger students and gain much valuable experience from working in the local café.
- The curriculum offer is wide and increasingly meets students' needs. A variety of courses and units is available which enables students to achieve worthwhile qualifications, such as GCSE examinations and work-related qualifications.
- This year there has been a strong focus on helping students prepare for independent living. Across the curriculum, students are given strategies to help solve problems they may meet on a day-to-day basis, such as travelling on public transport.
- Effective careers advice and interesting work experience placements prepare students well for leaving school and for the next stage of their lives. All students who are leaving this year have secured a place at colleges of further education, on apprenticeships and at residential colleges.

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	133586
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	462646

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

Type of school	Secondary
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	77
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	37
Number of boarders on roll	15
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alison Stacey
Headteacher	Mary Nest-Richardson
Date of previous school inspection	8–9 May 2013
Telephone number	01494 812139
Email address	office@pennschool.bucks.sch.uk

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