

Penkford School

Wharf Road, Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside WA12 9XZ

Inspection dates 25–26 February 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and her leadership team, supported by strong governors, have successfully moved the school forward since the last inspection. Staff morale is high and they fully support the headteacher's vision and her clear focus upon pupils' learning and well-being.
- Pupils' attendance is improving. They behave well in lessons and around school.
- Pupils' personal development and well-being are at the forefront of the school's work. They are well supervised, kept safe and cared for. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is encouraged, especially in regard to British values such as tolerance and respect.
- Teachers work well with teaching support staff to encourage pupils' engagement in lessons. Staff consistently follow the school's policy on teaching and learning.
- The great majority of all pupil groups make good progress from their starting points in reading, writing, spelling and mathematics. They go on to achieve external awards, including English and mathematics, up to GCSE level.
- All leaders contribute effectively towards ensuring that the quality of teaching continues its improvement since the last inspection through their careful checking of lessons and feedback to staff.
- Governors provide very effective support and challenge through their regular observations of and reports about the school's work.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teachers and support staff consistently take full account of the specific literacy needs of some pupils when planning their lessons. As a result, pupils occasionally become distracted from their learning and do not always make sufficient progress.
- Provision for design technology and computing does not yet give the full range of curriculum opportunities for pupils. A lack of specialist knowledge, skills and understanding by staff in design technology and computing limits pupils' learning in these subjects

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the outcomes for pupils with additional literacy needs by:
 - ensuring that all teachers and support staff become skilled in recognising and managing the needs of pupils with additional literacy needs
 - ensuring that all teachers and support staff share best practice (already in evidence in the school) in planning for and consistently meeting the needs of pupils with additional literacy needs in all subjects
 - ensuring that all teachers and support staff plan lessons in all subjects to consistently take full account of pupils with additional literacy needs.
- Enhance provision for design technology and computing by:
 - ensuring that staffing, resources and staff training needs are reviewed
 - ensuring that an action plan is agreed and implemented.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Since the last inspection, the headteacher, supported by other leaders and a strong governing body, has inspired her staff to improve the school so that its overall effectiveness is now good. Local authority support has been reduced, and it now plays a consultative role.
- The focus on high-quality teaching, learning and assessment is having a positive impact on pupils' attendance in school and on their progress in behaviour and learning. There is a very positive atmosphere in the school that promotes high staff morale along with the good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. There is a clear emphasis upon the promotion of British values seen in lessons and referred to in school assemblies, class displays and in the work of the school council and junior leadership team. The school's policy of equal opportunities is well promoted.
- The headteacher and her senior and middle leaders have successfully introduced effective systems for school improvement through their careful analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The revised roles and responsibilities of each member of staff have led to clear action planning and revised policies and procedures to support the school development plan. Staff are held to account via rigorous performance management policies.
- School leaders' and governors' monitoring of these agreed actions is relentless and leads to speedy improvements. For example, observations in lessons and the checking of pupils' progress in their workbooks have ensured that the school's agreed policies in teaching, learning and assessment have been followed through. The opportunities for staff to observe each other's practices in the classroom have given them a sense of ownership throughout this process. Some of these best practices occur when teaching support staff provide individual literacy support for pupils with additional literacy needs.
- Senior and middle leaders have combined to produce a document that provides clear information about pupils' learning and attendance. This means that staff gain invaluable insights into the progress of individuals and groups against the challenging targets that have been set. Teachers are now able to use this information to enable them to plan their lessons to meet the particular needs of all pupils, including those with additional literacy needs.
- The curriculum is broad and enriching and is enhanced by a range of exciting activities out of school, such as opportunities for more adventurous pupils to reach the base camp of Everest or to attempt the Ardeche Challenge, planned for later in the year. This develops pupils' self-confidence and encourages their positive attitudes to school life. There is a good mix of literacy and numeracy teaching alongside subjects that would be offered in a good mainstream school. An after-school club for pupils provides them with equal opportunities to develop their interests and self-confidence. However, school leaders should consider a review of its staffing arrangements for design technology and staff skills in computing to further broaden the range of curriculum opportunities for pupils.
- Through the Building Futures vocational centre and the school's link with a local careers advisory service, pupils receive good support and advice regarding what they can go on to next. Most pupils go on to further education, training or employment as a result.
- Partnership working with other schools, including a local special school, the safer schools police officers and parents are all positive aspects of the school's work to improve its provision and benefit its pupils.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance is a strength of the school. The governing body has been reconstituted since the last inspection so that there is a wide range of skills, knowledge and expertise to contribute to school improvement. Governors are regular visitors to the school and provide challenge and support through school improvement focus meetings presented by relevant staff.
 - Governors partake in observations of lessons and the checking of pupils' work and progress in line with the school's agreed policies on teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, they have a good understanding of why teaching has improved since the last inspection.
 - The work of middle and senior leaders to present information about pupils' learning, behaviour and attendance has enabled governors to have a clear insight into how particular groups or an individual are progressing. This information is used to challenge leaders and to hold them to account.
 - Performance management is used effectively for teaching and support staff. Good reference is made to the teachers' professional standards in how governors manage underperformance and reward good teaching.

- Committees have been set up, for example, for finance and staffing, to oversee decision making in particular aspects of the school's work. Finances are well managed. Governors have overseen the effective use of pupil premium funding (additional government funding) and Year 7 catch-up funding to address the needs of pupils who have more extreme difficulties in regard to their attendance, behaviour or literacy needs. Sports premium funding has been well used towards basketball and football equipment and to encourage younger pupils to partake in after-school sports activities.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Policies and procedures for safeguarding and related areas are regularly reviewed, updated and agreed by governors. The premises are secure and well maintained. Governors undergo relevant training in safeguarding and safer recruitment. They have received 'Prevent' training (a national programme to prevent young people being drawn into terrorism). There is a named governor for safeguarding.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the last inspection so that it is now consistently good. Teaching and support staff ensure that they follow agreed school policies, for example in the marking of pupils' work and how feedback is provided to pupils. Senior leaders have encouraged teachers to share best practice and to discuss pupils' workbooks together. The headteacher ensures that teachers benefit from the support and challenge provided by senior leaders' feedback after lesson observations.
- The headteacher and the governing body have ensured that teachers are recruited to meet the needs of each key stage in the school. For example, there are two primary specialists at Key Stage 2 and subject specialists or tutors at Key Stages 3 and 4. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and an ability to communicate effectively with pupils through explanation, modelling and discussion so that they stay on task and make progress in their learning.
- Pupils spoken to talk confidently about their work. For example, in Key Stage 2, younger pupils asked to talk to an inspector about their independent writing. They spoke knowledgeably about what they were learning and about the progress they were making following the teacher's marking of their work over time.
- Teachers and support staff have created attractive and welcoming classrooms so that pupils are stimulated to learn. For example, a mathematics display in Key Stage 3 was used daily by pupils to strengthen their knowledge, skills and understanding of fractions and the mathematical terms and phrases associated with what they were learning.
- Teachers mostly make effective use of pupil information to plan their lessons so that, for example, the most-able pupils can access higher levels of work in mathematics. This ensures that they are fully engaged in learning and are appropriately challenged because the teacher follows the agreed school policy on teaching, learning and assessment. Occasionally, the reading and writing requirements for pupils in lessons are not adapted in line with some pupils' literacy levels or abilities. This can lead to off-task behaviour and a reduced pace of learning and progress.
- Teaching support staff are deployed well to provide emotional support and prompts for pupils in their learning. Support staff provide one-to-one literacy sessions for some pupils with additional literacy needs away from the classroom. It is clear that these pupils develop a more secure grasp of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) and greater self-confidence during such sessions because of the knowledge, skills and understanding of staff involved. The wider sharing of these practices, particularly in the use of the information available about pupils with additional literacy needs, would lead to greater consistency in their provision across all subjects.
- Pupils partake enthusiastically in physical education lessons because they are taught by a specialist teacher who guides them in how to perform particular movements and actions in volleyball. They are able to improve their teamwork and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through these lessons.
- There is an up-to-date computer room in which pupils receive lessons from a specialist teacher. Subject teachers make use of this facility to support their class-based teaching. Teaching and support staff would benefit from further training in computing to further enhance pupils' learning across all subjects.

- Teachers and support staff provide opportunities for pupils to read. Pupils are motivated to read widely and regularly because of the 'reading challenge', which illustrates how often pupils read over a period of time. Good support is provided for pupils to make use of their phonic skills and to make sense of what they have read.
- Staff at the Building Futures vocational centre are specialists in their fields. They are able to engage effectively with pupils because they can knowledgeably demonstrate and explain the activities pupils are expected to complete, for example wallpapering and bricklaying skills.
- Pupils are taught aspects of technology, for example ceramics, food technology and information technology, but they would benefit from more skilled teaching and support in design technology and computing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Teachers and support staff work well with pupils to encourage high expectations regarding school uniform, following school and the Building Futures rules and codes of conduct, engaging in lessons and improving attendance.
- Pupils take responsibility for their actions around school and in the Building Futures vocational centre. There is no evidence of litter or graffiti in or out of classrooms. Some older pupils enjoy helping younger pupils in their reading.
- The headteacher states that assemblies are now routinely held. This had not been possible at the last inspection because pupils found it difficult to take responsibility for their behaviour. As a result, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils has become a strength of the school. For example, the safer schools police officers gave an assembly about the dangers of knife crime, which covered aspects of British values, including the rule of law, tolerance and respect. In another assembly, pupils entertained their peers when playing ukuleles.
- Pupils spoken to demonstrated tolerance and empathy when they stated that they would treat anybody with respect in their school, regardless of any differences in race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or religion. They state that there are no concerns about bullying. Expectations about behaviour are clear and occasional issues are dealt with by staff or the safer schools police officers, often through the process of what is called 'restorative justice'.
- Pupils spoken to say that they appreciate the approachability of all staff. They benefit from the support they give them in their learning or when they have personal problems.
- A number of pupils say that they feel safe in school, including the few girls that attend Penkford. Pupils take great responsibility to follow health and safety rules, for example during volleyball in the sports hall.
- Parents spoken to confirm that they know that staff keep their children safe in school. They confirm that safeguarding is at the core of what the school does and that there have been improvements since the last inspection. They say that, 'The school is fantastic; staff make you feel like you are not alone.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They behave well in the corridors and at breaktime, including at the Building Futures vocational centre. They are well supervised by caring staff who guide pupils to play collaboratively.
- All staff follow the agreed school policy on behaviour, including anti-bullying. This means that pupils understand the consequences of their behaviour.
- Information provided by the school shows that pupils' attendance since the last inspection has improved greatly. While there is still a small group of persistent absentees, additional pupil premium funding is being used well to improve attendance. There is evidence that an increasing number of pupils achieve full attendance in successive weeks because they are motivated by the school's reward systems, the school's curriculum and additional activities out of school.

- Fixed-term exclusions and the frequency of physical interventions by staff have reduced dramatically since the last inspection because pupils take increasing responsibility for their own behaviour. Observations in lessons by inspectors also indicated that the great majority of pupils engage well in learning and enjoy their work. Very occasionally, pupils become distracted or misbehave when the work provided does not take full account of their reading or writing abilities.
- Parents spoken to state that the behaviour of pupils is much improved since the last inspection.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- When pupils arrive at the school, most have experienced difficulties in their learning, behaviour and attendance. As a result, they come with lower than expected literacy and numeracy levels.
- Since the last inspection, when the progress of pupils, especially in English, was insufficient to close their gaps in learning, there have been clear improvements so that outcomes for pupils are now good, including in English. As a result, most-able pupils are now achieving GCSEs in English, mathematics, science, and art and design.
- There are opportunities for all pupils to achieve external academic and vocational qualifications through different routes or pathways, including both English and mathematics as a minimum. The Building Futures vocational centre enables older pupils to engage in practical learning, such as decorating or motor vehicle maintenance, which enhances their use and application of taught numeracy and literacy skills. Most pupils then move on to further education, employment or training.
- At Key Stage 2, younger pupils are all making good progress (including those supported by the pupil premium) from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. They demonstrate good attitudes to learning and enjoy the fact that they receive feedback from their teachers to show that they have improved in their handwriting, spelling and independent writing over time. They listen enthusiastically in class and respond well to teacher and support staff instruction and guidance.
- At Key Stage 3, most pupils are making good progress from their starting points in English, mathematics and science. There is no marked difference, generally, between the outcomes of pupils who benefit from pupil premium funding and their peers. However, the school has identified a group of pupils who came to the school at the end of Year 7 (summer 2015) who are not making the same progress as their peers. Pupil premium funding and Year 7 catch-up funding are being effectively used to ensure that the pupils' attendance, behaviour and academic progress begin to match more with their peers. A review by inspectors of case-study evidence demonstrates that there has been a positive impact due to these actions. For example, the support provided by a military mentor can be linked to reductions in physical interventions and fixed-term exclusions. The literacy support provided by skilled support staff has led to observed and recorded improvements in the reading, writing and spelling of targeted pupils.
- At Key Stage 4, most pupils, especially in Year 10, are making good progress from their starting points in English, mathematics and science – some achieving GCSE grades in mathematics in Year 10. However, a small group of Year 11 pupils require additional support with regard to their behaviour, attendance and academic progress. Pupil premium funding has been used in a similar way with Key Stage 4 pupils, but the Building Futures vocational centre has also been effective in engaging some pupils via a more vocational route.

School details

Unique reference number	104843
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10002200

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	8–16 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	54
Appropriate authority	the governing body
Chair	Margaret Williams
Headteacher	Julie Johnson
Telephone number	01744 678745
Website	www.penkford.st-helens.sch.uk
Email address	penkford@sthelens.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 October 2013

Information about this school

- Penkford School provides for primary- and secondary-aged pupils, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan (EHC) relating to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- The vast majority of pupils have a White British heritage and their first language is English.
- Most pupils (above the national average) are entitled to support provided by the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority). There are very few girls.
- The school operates the Building Futures vocational centre located in Moorcroft Road WA9 2DY, near the school. A number of older pupils do vocational training courses here. Other pupils from local schools make use of the centre in agreement with the school. This aspect was not part of the inspection process.
- The school has a working link with Woolton High School to share best practice.

Information about this inspection

- Observations were made by inspectors in lessons, including at the Building Futures vocational centre. The headteacher completed joint observations with an inspector. A learning walk was conducted by an inspector accompanied by the assistant headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and senior and middle leaders about the school's work. Inspectors met with two local authority representatives, the school improvement partner and six governors (including the Chair of Governors) to discuss school improvement issues. An inspector also met with the local police Chief Inspector, his colleague and two safer schools police officers.
- An inspector met with three parents to gain their views about the school. There were insufficient responses to consider from Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire survey for parents).
- Inspectors met formally and informally with small groups of pupils.
- Inspectors looked at a range of school documents, including reports about the school from external consultants; the school development plan; the school's document about how well the school is doing; safeguarding, behaviour and attendance policies and records; information about pupils' progress in their learning and policies relating to teaching and learning. Governors' documents and minutes of meetings were also considered.

Inspection team

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Ofsted Inspector

Mrs Ann Gill

Ofsted Inspector

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