

Penkridge Middle School

Marsh Lane, Penkridge, Stafford, Staffordshire ST19 5BW

Inspection dates

28 February to 1 March 2017

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher, ably supported by senior leaders, is relentless in her determination to provide the best-possible education for all pupils. She commands the support of pupils, parents and staff.
- The federation governing body provides excellent support and robust challenge to school leaders. Governors are committed to the school's vision for excellence.
- Senior leaders and governors know the school well and their evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is detailed and honest. They act swiftly to address weaknesses.
- Teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment are regular and accurate. Leaders use this information well to provide extra help for any pupils who need it.
- From the beginning of Year 5, to when they leave the school in Year 8, pupils make good progress in all subjects. However, progress is slower in English and mathematics in key stage 2 than in key stage 3.
- Specialist-subject teaching in all years means that pupils make particularly strong progress in subjects beyond English and mathematics. Consequently, pupils are academically very well prepared when they move on to high school.
- Relationships are strong across the school. Teachers know their pupils well and pupils like and trust their teachers.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They explain concepts well and they ask questions that help pupils think hard and develop a good understanding of their work.
- Expectations are generally high. However, teachers sometimes do not expect pupils to work hard enough and are occasionally too accepting of insufficient or poorly presented work.
- Leaders' and teachers' work to improve pupils' reading has been very effective. However, the development of writing is less strong because pupils have limited opportunities to write at length other than in English lessons.
- The teaching of reasoning is weaker than the teaching of other areas of mathematics. Pupils have strong basic skills, but do not apply these to solving problems sufficiently, especially in key stage 2.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and at other times of the day. They are polite, friendly and courteous to each other and to adults.
- The wide array of enrichment and leadership opportunities contributes extremely well to pupils' self-confidence. Their personal development is outstanding.
- Pupils feel safe, and are safe, in school. They enjoy coming to school and consequently, attendance is consistently higher than the national average.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in English and mathematics in key stage 2 by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have high expectations of the quantity and quality of work that pupils complete in lessons
 - pupils are taught to think more deeply and reason when solving problems in mathematics
 - pupils are expected to write at length in subjects other than English.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The appointment of the current headteacher, in February 2016, has re-energised the school. She is single-minded in her focus on providing high-quality teaching. Since her appointment, there have been several changes, all of which have been welcomed by staff, parents and pupils. All staff who completed the inspection questionnaire and almost all parents who responded to Parent View said that the school is well led and managed. Parents think very highly of the school and one parent summed up the views of many when they wrote, 'Penkridge is a fantastic school that is very well led.'
- Senior leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. They are honest about its weakness and tackle them ruthlessly. For example, they acknowledge that published key stage 2 outcomes have not been good enough over recent years. Leaders have set about rectifying this weakness through better use of assessment information and examination preparation. These actions yielded some improvement in 2016 and further improvement is evident for current pupils in Years 5 and 6.
- Leaders regularly check the progress that pupils are making. They use externally marked tests to verify internal school assessments. This process builds a detailed and accurate view of how each pupil, class, year and pupil group is progressing. Teachers and leaders use this information well to identify any pupil who is beginning to fall behind with their work. They then ensure that extra support is provided to help them catch up.
- Subject leaders form a united team who lead the development of teaching their areas. Their practice is consistent because senior leaders provide effective support and guidance. They keep a close eye on pupils' achievement and they ensure that teachers are held to account for the progress that their pupils make.
- Senior and middle leaders carry out regular checks on the quality of teaching. They tackle weakness quickly by providing extra support and training for teachers who need it. Teachers are set appropriate targets that are well focused on school priorities. Leaders then provide high-quality training to help teachers to improve their already strong practice. As a result, teachers value the professional development and the investment that the school makes in developing their practice.
- Having identified weaknesses in the school's support for disadvantaged pupils, leaders commissioned an independent review of the school's use of pupil premium funding in the summer of 2016. They have implemented the recommendations of this review with speed and enthusiasm. Class teachers now make the progress of disadvantaged pupils a top priority when they plan lessons. Leaders rigorously check on disadvantaged pupils' progress, providing extra help when any is needed. Leaders work more closely with parents to encourage regular attendance and study at home. Clear impact from these actions is now evident. Disadvantaged pupils in all years now make similar progress to other pupils and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils now matches other pupils nationally.
- Leaders use the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium well. It is closely targeted to pupils who have not made sufficient progress by the end of Year 6 and

takes the form of extra help with mathematics and English. Consequently, these pupils make particularly rapid progress in Year 7 that also continues into Year 8.

- The physical education (PE) and sport premium is spent thoughtfully and effectively. It is focused at enhancing specialist facilities and broadening sporting opportunities for pupils. For example, specialist teachers of dance and golf provide coaching for pupils.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective and improving. Leaders accurately identify pupils' additional needs and provide teachers with detailed information. Teachers are using this information increasingly well when planning lessons. Additional support from teachers and teaching assistants helps to ensure that pupils make good progress. Leaders are now carefully evaluating the impact of individual intervention strategies to determine which are being most effective and which need to be amended or discarded.
- The formation of the Penk Valley Federation in April 2016, and specifically the sharing of expertise, ideas, staff and training, have greatly benefited the school. For example, support from Wolgarston High School's mathematics department has improved mathematics teaching. Some staff have been appointed across the federation and this has provided specialist teaching in subjects including music and art. Transition from first to middle school and from middle to high school has been improved. This is because teachers in all the schools work together to ensure that the move from one school to another is as seamless as possible.
- The school's curriculum provides an appropriately broad range of subjects in all years. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 particularly benefit from specialist teachers in most subjects including science, history, geography, French, technology, art and music. Consequently, pupils' progress is particularly strong in these subjects in key stage 2. This strong progress then continues through key stage 3.
- The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities and visits that pupils enthusiastically embrace. These include many sporting clubs, choirs and ensembles, a STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) club and before-school homework and breakfast clubs.
- Weekly personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons are supplemented by daily 'class time' and weekly assemblies. This helps pupils to develop a good understanding of current affairs and fundamental British values including democracy and respect for people who are different from them. The school's curriculum, as a whole, contributes very strongly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. By the time they leave the school, pupils are mature, balanced young people who are well equipped for demands of high school.
- At the headteacher's request, the local authority has provided effective support to the school. For example, it has supported the school in its review of special educational needs provision and has also provided valuable training in the use of assessment data.

Governance of the school

- The current governing body came into being in April 2016 with the formation of the Penk Valley Federation and, since this time, it has been very effective in focusing the school on improving teaching and raising standards, especially in key stage 2. The school improvement plan is carefully constructed and well focused on addressing the

school's key priorities.

- Governors know the school well. They have a detailed understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and they provide rigorous challenge, alongside appropriate support, to school leaders. They adopt a 'no excuses' philosophy. For example, having been designated as a 'coasting school', governors have refused to use the fact that the school is a middle school, with key stage 2 tests being taken just 22 months after pupils join the school, as an excuse. Instead, they have tackled the issue of pupils' performance in key stage 2 tests head-on.
- Governors carry out their statutory duties diligently. They check that all safeguarding policies and procedures are fit for purpose. They ensure that additional funding including the pupil premium, the PE and sport premium, Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding and special educational needs funding, is used effectively to have maximum impact.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The leadership of this area is strong. Policies and procedures are clear and well understood by staff. Leaders understand procedures to recruit staff safely and they use these well. All staff are trained and updated regularly. For example, safeguarding appears as a standing agenda item at all meetings. Similarly, as part of the school's performance management process, all staff have to complete an audit of their safeguarding knowledge. Consequently, staff are well informed and confident to pass on any concerns they have, secure in the knowledge that they will be taken seriously and dealt with appropriately. Records are very well organised and stored securely.
- Staff understand that pupils' safety and well-being is their top priority. A culture of care pervades the school. All parents who responded to Parent View agreed that their children feel safe in school, as did all members of staff who responded to the inspection survey.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Pupils benefit from subject-specialist teaching in all years. Teachers' clear explanations and skilled questioning help pupils to develop a deep understanding of their work. Consequently, pupils make good progress in all subjects.
- Relationships between pupils and teachers are excellent. Because pupils like and trust their teachers, they are not afraid to answer questions or tackle demanding activities. Pupils are increasingly unafraid of making mistakes, confident in the knowledge that they will learn from their errors.
- Teachers' planning is consistently strong across the school. Consequently, tasks are well matched to pupils' ability and provide appropriate levels of challenge. Pupils are increasingly able to talk about their learning using a shared vocabulary across all subjects. For example, pupils talk about being 'in the pit' and knowing what they must do or understand to 'get out of the pit'. This is a reference to what they must do to make progress in a lesson.

- The teaching and promotion of reading is particularly effective. Pupils are expected to read regularly at home and in school in class times and in all subjects. They are encouraged to read different types of books. For example, pupils told inspectors that teachers had introduced them to autobiographies which they were now very much enjoying. External assessments of pupils' reading show that pupils make rapid progress in this area.
- Teaching provides well for any pupil who needs additional support with their work. Regular and accurate assessments of pupils' progress identify any pupil who is falling behind with their work. Leaders, teachers and teaching assistants then provide well-targeted and effective extra support that helps pupils catch up with their classmates.
- Pupils enjoy their learning. Many pupils told inspectors that their teachers make lessons interesting and that they feel involved in their learning.
- Disappointing key stage 2 writing results in 2015 led leaders to focus on improving the teaching of writing. Concerted effort resulted in much improved outcomes in 2016. However, almost all extended writing still takes place within English lessons. Pupils are rarely expected to write at length, using the skills they have acquired in English, in other subjects.
- Teachers' expectations are usually high. However, inspectors observed occasions where teachers did not expect pupils to work hard. Instead, pupils did less work than they ought without being challenged. Similarly, although pupils usually take great pride in their books, inspectors observed some instances of teachers accepting incomplete or untidy work.
- Following detailed analysis of mathematics assessments in key stage 2, teachers have focused successfully on improving pupils' basic skills. 'Methods Mondays' have helped to ensure that pupils have a good grasp of arithmetic skills. However, the teaching of reasoning to solve mathematical problems is less strong and pupils are not sufficiently expected to think in mathematics lessons.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are articulate and self-confident. They express their views sensibly and maturely and are increasingly self-reflective about their work and progress. They are ambitious to do well. Inspectors spoke with many pupils who could clearly explain their current attainment and what they needed to do in order to further improve.
- Pupils eagerly take advantage of the wide variety of leadership opportunities that the school provides. For example, pupils act as class and house representatives. Others help younger pupils with their reading or are music prefects or design technology young technicians. Pupils sit on the school and house councils and contribute ideas for school development.
- The school's formal curriculum, its wide range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities, combined with a comprehensive PSHE programme incorporating effective careers guidance, contributes strongly to pupils' personal development. They

are very well prepared to move to high school, academically, socially and with well-developed learning habits.

- Pupils feel safe in school. All pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe in school, as did all who responded to the online inspection questionnaire. They said that bullying is very rare indeed and they trust the school's adults to deal with any bullying, or other problems which might arise.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe when using the internet. The school's work on e-safety means that pupils know about the potential hazards of using the internet. They also understand how to keep themselves safe from such hazards. Pupils shared with inspectors the key rules to staying safe online.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils generally behave very well in lessons. Almost all pupils work hard and are keen to do their best. Occasionally, a few of pupils behave less well, chatting and doing little work. For the most part, teachers deal with low-level disruption well, but occasionally teachers fail to nip it in the bud. More serious disruption of lessons is very rare indeed. Serious sanctions including fixed-term exclusion and internal isolation are therefore very rarely used.
- Behaviour at breaktime, lunchtime and between lessons is very good. Pupils are courteous, sensible and polite. Consequently, the school is calm throughout the day, even during a wet lunchtime, as observed by inspectors. Pupils, staff and parents all agree that behaviour is good in the school. Inspectors agree.
- Pupils enjoy school. They like their lessons, they trust their teachers and they value the opportunities provided for them. Consequently, attendance is consistently higher than the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils, which although not low has been lower than others, has improved considerably this year. It is now very similar to the attendance of other pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The school conducts regular and externally-marked assessments of pupils' attainment in English and mathematics all years. This assessment information shows that pupils make good progress in these subjects by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 8. Detailed inspection evidence confirms this to be the case.
- Published information about pupils' progress at the end of Year 6 shows weaknesses in English and mathematics. This is because, historically, the school placed insufficient emphasis on preparing pupils for key stage 2 tests. Since the headteacher's appointment in February 2016, this has been rectified and preparation for external tests is much more rigorous. Consequently, there was some improvement in published outcomes in 2016. The school's assessment information, supported by inspection evidence, indicates that this trajectory of improvement is continuing.
- Published key stage 2 results in 2016 presented a mixed picture. Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was average. However, pupils' progress, especially in

mathematics, was weak and led to the school meeting the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school in 2016. Outcomes in grammar, punctuation and spelling and in science were better than those seen nationally.

- Specialist teaching in both key stages 2 and 3 ensures that pupils make strong progress in all year groups in science, history, geography, French, computing, technology, art, PE and music. Consequently, pupils are very well prepared to begin Year 9 in high school, with a secure base of knowledge and understanding across the curriculum.
- Disadvantaged pupils are now making similar good progress to their peers. Leaders have addressed historic weakness in key stage 2 published results through a whole-school focus on raising standards for these pupils. Regular checks on progress trigger extra help if any pupil begins to fall behind with their work.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. Teachers have detailed information that they use in planning their lessons and teaching assistants provide effective support both in lessons and at other times.
- The most able pupils make strong progress in all subjects. Expectations of these pupils are generally high, teaching is good and pupils rise to the challenges that teachers provide.

School details

Unique reference number	124423
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10025372

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	423
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Roberts
Headteacher	Natalie Frost
Telephone number	01785 413 400
Website	http://penkridge.staffs.sch.uk
Email address	headteacher@penkridge.staffs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 June 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized middle school.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. Very few speak English as an additional language.
- It has a below-average proportion of disadvantaged pupils.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- The school is part of the Wolgarston collaboration between 11 local first and middle schools, together with Wolgarston High School.
- The headteacher took up post in February 2016.

- In April 2016, the school became a founding member of the Penk Valley Federation with Princefield First School, Marshbrook First School and Wolgarston High School. The four schools share a governing body.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' progress in English and mathematics.
- The school meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 2 academic performance results in 2014, 2015 and 2016.
- The school does not make any use of alternative provision for pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons, and some of these were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their learning and their attitudes to, and opinions about, school. They observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors observed intervention sessions and morning 'class time'.
- Inspectors scrutinised the work in many pupils' books in order to make judgements about the progress they were making.
- A wide range of documents was scrutinised including information relating to attendance, behaviour, safeguarding, pupils' progress and the checks made on the quality of teaching.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, other leaders, teachers and three governors including the chair of the federation governing body. The lead inspector spoke over the telephone with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors considered 105 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 54 free-text comments.
- Inspectors took account of 24 responses received to Ofsted's staff inspection questionnaire and 93 responses to its pupil inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Alun Williams, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mark Feldman	Ofsted Inspector
Elizabeth Ellis-Martin	Ofsted Inspector
Adele Mills	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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