

Penn Fields School

Boundary Way, Penn, Wolverhampton, West Midlands WV4 4NT

Inspection dates

27–28 March 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Recent changes of senior leadership have exposed leaders' and governors' lack of an accurate understanding of aspects of the school's performance. Over time, they have not held members of staff well enough to account for their actions.
- The school's self-evaluation lacks precision. Leaders have not evaluated the impact of the school's work well enough to inform the school's development plan.
- While the curriculum provides a suitable breadth of subjects for pupils, it lacks a cohesive approach and intent.
- Leaders have not developed their assessment systems sufficiently well. Targets are based on out-of-date guidance and are not suitably challenging.
- Teachers rely too much on assessment criteria to plan learning activities for pupils, rather than building on pupils' knowledge and skills.
- Teachers do not consistently ensure that activities are well matched to pupils' needs. Sometimes, their expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low, especially for the most able pupils.
- Pupils are making better progress in literacy than in mathematics.
- Leaders have not ensured that there is a whole-school systematic approach to the teaching of phonics.
- Phase leaders have recently been given additional whole-school responsibilities, but have insufficient time to carry out their duties effectively.
- The use of some additional funding, including the Year 7 catch-up funding, lacks clarity and purpose.
- Leaders have not yet developed a clear vision for the sixth-form provision. Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning are limited.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils are very well behaved, polite and respectful. They attend well and enjoy their time at school.
- The caring staff know the pupils well and build excellent relationships.
- Safeguarding procedures are effective. Staff are well trained and keep pupils safe from harm.
- The well-being curriculum supports pupils' personal development effectively.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management, by:
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels accurately evaluate the school’s performance, and use this information to identify priority areas for improvement that are shared and understood by all staff
 - developing the role of phase leaders across all key stages, including ensuring that they are given sufficient training and time to contribute to whole-school improvement and to carry out their roles effectively
 - ensuring that a suitable assessment system is in place which enables leaders to check on pupils’ progress systematically and to inform whole-school improvement
 - making sure that the additional barriers to learning experienced by disadvantaged pupils are clearly identified, thereby targeting support and evaluating its impact more precisely
 - ensuring that suitable plans are made for the use of the Year 7 catch-up funding.
- Review the school’s curriculum, including the sixth-form curriculum, so that:
 - all staff have a clear understanding of the vision and intent of the curriculum
 - teachers have a clear understanding of how to develop pupils’ knowledge and skills over time, across all key stages.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, so that:
 - activities are well matched to pupils’ needs, including for the most able pupils
 - pupils make better progress in mathematics
 - staff receive appropriate professional development that enables them to deliver a systematic, synthetic approach to the teaching of phonics.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Recent circumstances and changes in senior leadership have had an impact on leaders' capacity to further improve the school. Moreover, they have also highlighted that staff have been given too much autonomy in their roles and have not been held to account well enough.
- The school's self-evaluation lacks precision and focus. It is overly descriptive and does not evaluate the impact of the school's work well enough to enable leaders to inform school improvement.
- Leaders and governors do not have a good enough understanding of some aspects of the school's performance. Pupils' progress and attainment have not been analysed sufficiently well to enable leaders to use this information as a focus for whole-school improvement. For example, pupils' progress in mathematics is not as strong as that seen in literacy, but this is not identified as an area for improvement in the school's plans.
- Phase leaders have now been given additional whole-school responsibilities. They are committed to bringing about improvements to the school and have some vision and ambition for the future. However, their roles are underdeveloped, and they currently have insufficient time to carry out their duties effectively.
- Leaders have an established cycle for the monitoring of teaching and learning, which consists of lesson observations and a work trawl, based on the school's marking policy. Leaders were unable to articulate well enough how they use this information to inform whole-school improvement.
- Teachers appreciate the professional development opportunities they receive. Training is mostly focused on supporting all aspects of pupils' well-being and safeguarding. Teachers have limited opportunities to learn about how to develop pupils' learning in different curriculum areas.
- The school's curriculum provides pupils with a suitable breadth of activities and experiences in a range of subjects, which supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. Pupils benefit from extra-curricular activities such as residential and theatre visits, and participation in forest school activities. Teachers ensure that their planning incorporates British values. The overarching SMSC strategy has not been reviewed for four years to ensure that it is fit for purpose.
- The school's well-being and safeguarding curriculum provides good support for pupils' personal development. Pupils' knowledge and understanding in these areas are clearly mapped and developed over time.
- Despite these relative strengths, the curriculum lacks an overall cohesive vision and direction, because leaders have not developed a shared understanding of their intent. Even though leaders have identified the curriculum as a focus for improvement in their development planning, the rationale for this is not identified in their self-evaluation. The plan shows that leaders are developing their curricula separately in their phases, rather than working together on a whole-school vision.

- Leaders have not ensured that there is a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics. Currently, there is an aspiration for a daily phonics session, but in practice, this does not always happen. Currently, the school uses five different reading schemes, which does not provide a consistent approach to supporting the development of pupils' phonics skills. A system to track pupils' phonics skills has recently been introduced, but support is not yet well targeted.
- The primary physical education (PE) and sport premium funding is used well to support pupils' physical development. Pupils enjoy participating in outdoor adventure activities at the Sycamore Centre. Pupils benefit from additional swimming sessions and these are evaluated well.
- Additional funding to support children looked after is used well because these pupils' needs are accurately identified. The use of funding for other disadvantaged pupils is less focused because this group of pupils' needs and specific additional barriers to learning have not been identified. Leaders do not have a clear plan for their use of the Year 7 catch-up funding.

Governance of the school

- While governors are clearly dedicated to the school, they have taken the information they have been given by leaders at face value and have not challenged them well enough. Governors are not sufficiently involved in the school's self-evaluation or subsequent development planning.
- Governors have not ensured that they have carried out some of their statutory duties well enough. Several policies have not been reviewed in line with the school's review cycle, and some information, such as the information about the use of the current Year 7 catch-up funding, is missing from the school's website.
- Governors have arranged additional training for the governing body. This is due to take place before the end of the spring term. With the imminent retirement of the headteacher, they are increasing leadership capacity with the appointment of an interim assistant headteacher.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding systems in the school are strong. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) ensures that any concerns about pupils' welfare are followed up quickly. She is tenacious in her pursuit of securing the right support for any pupil in need of additional help.
- The DSL has established a comprehensive programme of training for staff in all aspects of safeguarding. Staff told inspectors that they value the training they receive. Staff receive regular updates and checks on how well they understand procedures for reporting concerns. Records are detailed and up to date, and show where additional support from outside agencies is sought for pupils.
- Leaders ensure that the appropriate checks are carried out on staff prior to their appointment at the school, to ensure that they are suitable to work with children.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement because there is too much inconsistency in practice across the school. Activities are not consistently matched to pupils' needs and abilities. On occasions, activities do not stretch and challenge the most able pupils, or support the least able pupils sufficiently well. As a result, these pupils do not make as much progress as they could. On occasions, staff try to do too much for the pupils, rather than letting pupils have a go for themselves.
- Staff know the pupils well and create a positive climate for learning in their classrooms. Pupils are appreciative of the help they receive and have a positive attitude to learning.
- Pupils are most engaged in their learning when teachers plan purposeful activities that are well matched to individual needs. Teachers use a variety of sensory-based approaches or practical equipment to interest pupils and retain their focus.
- Where teachers' subject knowledge is strong, this is reflected in their high expectations of pupils. Key stage 3 pupils were confidently using the correct names of instruments in their discussions about a recent visit to Symphony Hall. They then applied this knowledge to discriminate between different instrumental sounds in an orchestral piece of music. Pupils were supported effectively to refine their use of language when developing their group presentations in drama.
- Teachers are constrained in their planning by the current curriculum. Too often, teachers are using assessment criteria to plan activities. Inspectors saw several examples of work in pupils' books that did not follow a sequence of learning that builds pupils' knowledge and skills over time.
- Work in pupils' books shows that pupils are making progress over time. In literacy, pupils' work is linked to stories and texts which help to engage pupils and improve their writing. Pupils in key stage 3 are experiencing texts from different genres, such as 'The Iron Man', and 'Macbeth'. Work in pupils' books shows that writing is mainly focused on the development of spelling, punctuation and grammar skills. Pupils have fewer opportunities to apply these skills in other contexts, such as in creative writing.
- The teaching of phonics is not consistent across the school. Staff had not had training to implement a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics. As a result, there are gaps in teachers' phonic subject knowledge. This leads to some incorrect modelling of pure sounds, or the staff encouraging pupils to decode words that are not phonetically decodable.
- Pupils benefit from participating in a variety of practical-based science activities, to develop their scientific knowledge. Pupils have opportunities to work independently, and show an awareness of the importance of health and safety, such as wearing goggles when carrying out experiments.
- Some pupils access additional support, or interventions, which are planned as a result of teacher referrals to phase leaders. Support for the development of pupils' language and communication skills is well established and is having a positive impact on pupils' communication and language development. Other interventions have been introduced more recently but there is no evaluation of the impact of this additional support.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The well-being curriculum strongly supports all aspects of pupils' personal development. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe at school and are supported well to learn how to keep themselves safe.
- Sex and relationships education is appropriately matched to the needs of the pupils. They are developing a greater understanding of their bodies, how to keep safe, and what is appropriate touching.
- Pupils know that they have people to whom they can talk in school. They told inspectors that bullying is rare, and they work as a team to help each other. They know that staff help them deal with any problems they may have. One pupil summed up the feelings of others by saying, 'Sometimes it's hard for children here, but teachers help us.'
- Pupils have a good understanding of differences and demonstrate a mature attitude. The school council agreed with a pupil who commented that, 'There's nothing wrong with being gay or a lesbian – people should appreciate who they are.'
- Pupils are confident to share their views in lessons and around the school. Inspectors saw pupils enjoying the opportunity to discuss 'truth and invention' during assembly. Pupils spoke clearly, and with confidence, in front of other pupils.
- Pupils are benefiting from additional support for their well-being, such as the participation in sensory circuits, or haptic massage. These enable pupils to regulate their sensory difficulties better and be ready for learning.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils conduct themselves extremely well in lessons, and around the school building. They move up and down stairs sensibly and safely. They show respect for one another during the day, including at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Leaders have ensured that lunchtimes are structured in a way that enables pupils to feel safe. There is a calm atmosphere and pupils benefit from several quiet areas around the building, where they can relax, or take part in games and activities. Leaders are able to show that behaviour has improved as a result of these changes.
- Inspectors saw a group of key stage 4 pupils learning how to develop their conversation skills and understand why the ability to converse is important for their future. Pupils were kind to each other and took turns to listen.
- There are very few incidents of inappropriate behaviour. When pupils have difficulty in managing their behaviour, they are supported well, for example through a short sensory break, before returning to the lesson. Teachers frequently reinforce their high expectations of good behaviour so that pupils are in no doubt about what is expected of them.

- Pupils' attendance at school is high. No pupils are on part-time timetables. Any persistent absence is usually linked to pupils' medical needs. The school engages the support of an education welfare officer to challenge the small number of pupils who are persistently absent. Absence is monitored closely and can result in court action, if parents refuse to engage in order to improve their child's attendance.
- Fixed-term exclusions rarely happen. They are only used as a last resort and leaders ensure that they seek additional help from external agencies for pupils where appropriate.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Leaders currently base their judgements about pupils' progress on 2010 guidance, which has not been updated since the revised national curriculum was introduced. As a result, targets are not suitably challenging. At the time of the previous inspection, leaders knew this, but their newly introduced assessment system was not embedded. Subsequently, leaders have now decided that this system is not wholly suitable, and so are in the process of sourcing an alternative system.
- Leaders have not ensured that teachers' judgements about pupils' work are checked and moderated sufficiently. Despite leaders' assertions that they carry out internal moderation, inspectors were not provided with any evidence of this.
- While the majority of key stage 4 pupils attained the school's expected outcomes in functional skills English and mathematics in 2018, outcomes in functional skills were lower in mathematics than they were in literacy.
- In 2018, pupils who reached the end of key stage 4 achieved a range of accreditation in other subjects, including science, personal and social development, and art. A very small number of pupils achieved a GCSE in art and four pupils achieved a GCSE in information and communication technology (ICT).
- At the end of key stage 4 in 2018, the school's own assessment information showed that all pupils made the progress that leaders expected. However, fewer pupils reached the school's higher expectations, including the most able pupils.
- In 2018, the school's own assessment information showed that all key stage 2 pupils made the progress that leaders expected. However, fewer pupils reached the school's higher expectations in numeracy, compared with literacy.
- Nearly all pupils at the end of key stage 4 achieved their Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme bronze award in 2018.
- Year 11 pupils are able to participate in work experience activities and there has been a recent success in the offer of an apprenticeship for one pupil.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- The phase leader for the sixth form is developing a vision for the curriculum, but this is not yet fully established. Leaders have not ensured that the evaluation of the sixth form is precise enough because it is not supported well enough by evidence from monitoring activities. Priority areas for improvement have been identified, but these do

not match the evaluation.

- Leaders are not yet analysing students' outcomes well enough to identify patterns in progress and attainment. For example, leaders had not identified that students' outcomes in ICT were weaker from their starting points, compared with outcomes in English and mathematics.
- In 2018, all students achieved a functional skills qualification in English and mathematics, at a higher level than their starting points.
- Leaders do not have a good enough understanding of the progress that students are making because they do not have sufficient time to check on the standards of teaching and learning, and of the students' work.
- Students behave well in the sixth form. They are being prepared for their future through a range of activities. Inspectors saw students considering qualities that are important for the workplace, such as being polite and hard-working.
- Students enjoy taking part in the 'Snack Shack', a weekly activity that enables students to prepare snacks. They also enjoy tending to the school's allotment, where they can learn how to grow vegetables and care for plants.
- A small number of students have achieved the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme silver award.
- Students are not consistently challenged in their learning because work presented to them is sometimes too easy. On occasions, they repeat work that they have already completed and understood. The most able students are not being sufficiently challenged in their work.
- Students in the sixth form take on additional responsibilities in school. However, staff sometimes do too much for the students, for example writing for them, or giving out their books.
- Leaders are now taking into consideration students' interests and needs, and have made some changes to the curriculum. These curriculum developments are not yet in place for all students and have an impact on their subject choices. Currently, students are not able to access a food technology qualification because the timetable does not allow enough time for this subject. Leaders are planning to make changes to the timetable and curriculum very soon.
- Students benefit from appropriate careers advice and guidance. In 2018, all students moved on to further education, employment or training. Students engage in on-site work experience activities, but opportunities to work away from the school are more limited. Leaders are beginning to address this issue.

School details

Unique reference number	104412
Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	10058504

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	156
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	10
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Diane Morgan
Headteacher	Elaine Stanley
Telephone number	01902 558640
Website	www.pennfields.com
Email address	estanley@pennfields.com
Date of previous inspection	24 January 2018

Information about this school

- Penn Fields School is a large special school with a sixth form, on the same site as Highfields Secondary School.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan, usually for their moderate or severe learning difficulties. Most pupils have additional needs, such as autism spectrum disorder, speech, language and communication needs, and/or sensory and medical needs.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is higher than the national average.
- Most pupils are of White British origin.

- The school provides an outreach service to mainstream schools in Wolverhampton.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The current headteacher retires in April 2019. Her successor has been appointed and will take up her position at the beginning of the summer term.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across all key stages in the school.
- An inspector listened to a group of pupils read.
- Inspectors met with the school council to talk about their experiences at Penn Fields School.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the DSL and phase and subject leaders. The lead inspector met with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector met with the school's improvement adviser from Wolverhampton local authority.
- Inspectors met with a small number of parents at the beginning of the day and considered the six free-text responses to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View. There were too few responses to the online survey to take them into account.
- An inspector met with a group of staff.
- Inspectors looked at the 43 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in books across a range of different subjects, both in the classroom and as a separate work scrutiny.
- Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including the school's website, self-evaluation and improvement plans, progress and attainment information, policies, training records, monitoring information and minutes of governing body meetings. They looked at safeguarding information, including child protection information, pupil files, behaviour and attendance records, and the school's checks on staff recruitment.

Inspection team

Deb Jenkins, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Johanne Clifton	Ofsted Inspector
Malcolm Willis	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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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