

Inspection of Penn Fields School

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

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 January 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Penn Fields School develop trusting and positive relationships with staff and each other. Staff are caring, kind and supportive. They take the time to get to know pupils well. Smiles and warm greetings are commonplace. This helps pupils to enjoy school. They attend regularly.

Staff work alongside parents and carers well from the outset to get to know pupils' individual learning, physical, sensory and communication needs. Staff use this information carefully to remove barriers to learning and enable pupils to achieve.

Leaders want all pupils to achieve their very best. They pay attention to developing pupils' independence and preparing them for their next stages of their life and education. As part of this work, pupils participate in a range of activities outside of the classroom. These activities include taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, residential trips and running the coffee shop.

Respectful and kind relationships underpin all that is good at Penn Fields. Bullying is rare and staff help pupils to resolve any concerns that may arise. This helps pupils to feel safe. Pupils in most lessons settle quickly to their work. Very little time is wasted.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders are ambitious for pupils. Leaders, including governors, have taken effective steps to improve the quality of education at the school over recent years. Staff are proud to work at the school. They appreciate the support that school leaders give them. Staff say that leaders care about their well-being and are considerate of their workload.

Leaders have established a high expectation for what pupils should learn and when they should learn it. They make sure that all pupils learn a broad range of subjects. Most pupils learn these subjects in depth. For example, in art and design, pupils learn about local artists and visit a local art gallery. This helps pupils to develop a love of art and design and to see connections with the world of work.

Subject leaders make sure that most pupils learn the right things in the right order. For example, in mathematics, teachers make sure that pupils know how to use money before introducing the idea of budgeting. In most subjects, leaders have ensured that teachers know the precise knowledge that pupils need to know and remember. However, this is not the case for some pupils with the most complex needs. Activities are not always well matched to their needs. This slows their learning and stops them from reaching their full potential. For example, in writing, some teachers are not as skilful in teaching the small steps that pupils need to move from mark making to accurate letter formation.

Pupils have a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) which can make learning difficult. Teachers work with parents and carers to get an accurate understanding of pupils' needs. From this, the right provision is put in place to support the communication, learning, sensory or health needs of the pupils. For example, teachers work closely with speech and language therapists to adapt lessons to make them more understandable for pupils.

Leaders promote reading well. Leaders make regular checks on pupils' phonics knowledge. They use these checks to identify pupils who are not keeping up with the school's reading programme. Leaders make sure that these pupils get the help they need from well-trained adults. In addition, pupils get ample practice at reading books that are well matched to their stage of learning. In almost all areas of the school, including social areas, pupils have access to a wide variety of interesting books and texts. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about story time and the books they have read.

Students in the sixth form gain qualifications in English and mathematics. They also study a wide range of courses which include animal care, mechanics, food technology, carpentry, horticulture, and hair and beauty. Students benefit from quality and timely careers advice. This means that most pupils have a clear idea of what they would like to do in the future. In addition, this support means that students are actively developing the knowledge and skills they need to be successful.

The school environment is calm and orderly. During break and lunchtimes, pupils socialise together well. For some pupils, their SEND mean that sometimes they find it hard to manage their behaviour. Adults help these pupils well through the delivery of well-thought-out therapeutic approaches. Some pupils, for example, relish the opportunity to care for the school's chickens. This allows pupils to remain settled and focused throughout the day.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff understand that pupils with SEND often have significant and complex vulnerabilities. As a result, staff receive regular training to keep pupils safe. They ensure that they know their pupils well, so that they can spot when anything may be wrong or is worrying to the pupil.

There are good links between the school's welfare team and the pupils' families. Staff understand their responsibility to report any concern. Concerns are recorded and followed up with the appropriate agencies when needed. Leaders have appropriate procedures in place to manage any allegations.

Pupils learn about personal safety in the curriculum as well as keeping safe online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- For some pupils with the most complex needs, teachers are not sufficiently clear about the small steps pupils need to learn. This means that teachers do not consistently provide pupils with the activities and help they need to build their knowledge over time. This limits pupils' progress. Leaders should ensure that teachers have a clear understanding of the smaller steps of knowledge pupils need to secure, to enable pupils to get the best outcomes from the curriculum.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	104412
Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	10256929
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	186
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	26
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vivienne Bunce
Headteacher	Laura Thackaberry
Website	www.pennfields.com
Date of previous inspection	27 to 28 March 2019

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 (EHC) 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.
- Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes to the leadership of the school. The current headteacher commenced appointment in April 2019. Two deputy headteachers were appointed shortly after, and a new governing body was formed during this period.
- The school uses two registered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and

engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading and English, mathematics, art and design and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at individual pupils' EHC plans and checked these against the school's provision.
- Inspectors spoke to the leaders of the sixth form and visited the sixth-form area.
- Inspectors heard pupils in different year groups read.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the governing body and spoke to a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors observed informal times of the day to evaluate pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors considered a wide variety of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan.
- Inspectors took note of the responses received on Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and considered the results of the Ofsted staff and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors spoke to the alternative providers to gain an insight into the provision on offer and the quality assurance and safeguarding arrangements that were in place.
- Inspectors asked pupils, staff, leaders and governors about safeguarding arrangements. They reviewed records linked to safeguarding and found out about the safety procedures and routines at the school.

Inspection team

Amjid Zaman, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Jane Edgerton	Ofsted Inspector
Russell Hinton	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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