

Penkridge Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124423
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	292992
Inspection dates	20–21 June 2007
Reporting inspector	David Anstead HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	431
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Davenport
Headteacher	Peter Singer
Date of previous school inspection	25 June 2001
School address	Marsh Lane Penkridge Stafford ST19 5BW
Telephone number	01785 355545
Fax number	01785 355551

Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Penkrige Middle School is of average size when compared to other middle schools. The proportion of children eligible for free school meals is below average. Children from minority ethnic backgrounds represent a much lower proportion than the national average and there are no pupils for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of children with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Penkridge Middle School is a good place to learn. It is a happy and harmonious community where relationships and behaviour are excellent. Children enjoy their time at the school, where they are helped to develop into self-confident individuals. They are considerate of others and aware of how their own actions may impact on the safety of themselves and others. There are many opportunities for children to contribute to the community, which are enthusiastically embraced. Parents are highly appreciative of the way the school cares for their children and helps them develop. One parent wrote to inspectors: "We have nothing but praise for the school. There is a very caring attitude towards the pupils." Personal development and well-being are outstanding.

Teaching and learning are good overall but there are inconsistencies between teachers and different subjects. In the best lessons work of varying challenge is planned which is appropriate for the differing starting points of children. In these lessons classroom management is good and ensures all children progress at a good pace. Where learning is only satisfactory, not all ability groups are fully stretched and assessment of their work does not show them clearly what they need to do to improve. The curriculum is good and the range of lunchtime and after-school clubs and activities is outstanding.

Children join the school with broadly average attainment. Overall they make good progress from Years 5 to 8 so that standards are above average and achievement is good. The school closely monitors children's academic progress and identifies any individuals who are underachieving. Extra support is provided which is effective in helping them catch up. The personal development needs of children with learning difficulties or disabilities are systematically evaluated and monitored. Specific extra support is provided which ensures these children make the same outstanding progress in their personal development as the other children do. Care and support are good overall whilst guidance is only satisfactory because the advice children receive on how to improve their work is inconsistent.

The headteacher is well respected by the staff and parents. Under his leadership the school has made good improvements, notably in the care and personal development of children. Leadership and management overall are good. However, inconsistencies in the work of the school result from a lack of clarity about what constitutes good practice in, for example, using the outcomes of assessment to plan work of appropriate challenge. Self-evaluation is used securely to identify strengths and weaknesses. Strategies are introduced to improve areas identified as weaknesses but the school does not evaluate the impact of actions it has taken with sufficient rigour to know how successful they have been.

What the school should do to improve further

- Set a clear strategic direction to ensure the work of teachers in different subjects is more consistent, particularly in providing guidance to children on how to improve.
- Evaluate more rigorously the impact of actions taken to bring about improvement.
- Ensure teachers use assessment information to plan work of differing challenge appropriate to children's differing starting points.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school has forged strong links with its feeder schools and with the high school to which the vast majority of children transfer at the end of Year 8. A common approach to tracking the academic progress of children has been instigated by the schools and the outcomes are shared between them. Tracking is extremely detailed and shows the progress made by each child term by term. The school's assessments of progress are validated annually by the national test results.

Tests taken by children just before they join the school in Year 5 show attainment on entry is broadly average. Children make good progress through Key Stage 2 so that by the time they sit the national tests at the end of Year 6, standards are above average, with no subject significantly below. Progress continues to be good overall during Key Stage 3 and is strongest in science and modern foreign languages. It is satisfactory in reading. Children with learning difficulties or disabilities make the same good progress as other children and a few make outstanding progress.

The school follows national guidance in setting statutory targets based upon prior attainment. The target for English was exceeded in 2006 whilst that for mathematics was only just missed. For future years the school is using a revised process in which it is aspiring to be amongst the top 25% of all schools for achievement. Targets are both challenging and realistic.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Children greatly enjoy their education, and this is demonstrated in their good attendance and excellent behaviour. They participate enthusiastically in the rich variety of activities they are offered, especially sport. Children make healthy choices. They are acutely aware of the importance of their own safety and that of others.

Spiritual, moral and cultural development is good, and social development is outstanding. Children's emotional well-being is sensitively attended to and this is a real strength of the school. Very positive relationships in the school encourage excellent attitudes to learning. Pupils appreciate the attractive environment for learning and say they feel proud when they see their work displayed.

Bullying is rare and effectively dealt with. A helpline has recently been established, giving children the opportunity to report incidents with confidence that they will be resolved. Children feel safe and able to talk to adults about any problems. They particularly value the support of the school nurse, the teaching assistants and the lunchtime supervisors, as well as the teachers. Children develop strong positive values about equality.

Children appreciate the fact that their views are sought, listened to and taken seriously, and that changes are made in the school as a result. They relish the many opportunities they are given to take responsibility, and the contribution they make to the community of the school is outstanding. Many children in Year 8 participate as 'Buddies' or 'Bright Sparks', supporting younger children, and this enables them to grow in confidence and maturity. Children with learning difficulties or disabilities participate fully in the opportunities for taking responsibility and making a contribution.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are secure in their subject knowledge and have good classroom management skills. Relationships between staff and children are warm and encouraging. Teaching is best where there is detailed planning, questioning is used skilfully to develop understanding, and learning proceeds at a brisk pace. In those lessons observed where teaching was satisfactory, the pace was adequate but work had not always been varied to meet the differing needs of children in the class. In lessons where there was no teaching assistant in support, this particularly limited the progress of the least able.

Whilst teachers mark children's written work diligently, the quality of assessment is inconsistent between teachers of different subjects. Where assessment is good, children are clearly informed of the level they are working at and understand what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and meets children's needs, including in English, mathematics and science. The best schemes of work indicate how the differing needs of learners will be met, but this is not consistent. There is good provision for a modern foreign language and this is popular with children. Specific attention is paid to being healthy and staying safe in lessons on citizenship. These also help children to develop economic understanding through a focus on charities which includes many opportunities for their active participation.

Extra-curricular and enrichment activities are outstanding and contribute significantly to children's enjoyment and achievement. A very wide range is offered and most children participate. Children greatly enjoy these activities, particularly sport and the numerous trips and visits. All children have at least two residential experiences which help build confidence, independence and a cohesive community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Children enjoy good care, guidance and support. Their welfare is a high priority for the school and pastoral care is strong. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet statutory requirements and the arrangements for child protection and risk assessment are robust. The school has developed an effective disability equality scheme. The school travel plan contributes to ensuring children's safety as well as to their environmental awareness. In some subjects children are aware of the National Curriculum level they are working at, and what they need to do to improve, but this is inconsistent across the school. Provision for children with learning difficulties or disabilities is good because there are detailed plans to help them improve and individual specialist teaching is well targeted. As a result they make good progress. Their social needs are systematically analysed and addressed, and this good practice has a positive impact on their personal development. In some lessons, particularly in English, mathematics and science, children with learning difficulties or disabilities are well supported by teaching assistants but this help is not always available in other areas of the curriculum.

Support for transition from first schools is good and children are well prepared for their move to high school. The school works very well in partnership with other organisations.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well managed and runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Most issues from the previous inspection have been addressed. There have been substantial improvements in the provision for art, and the school's monitoring of teaching indicates there has been a small improvement here too. The greatest progress has been in improving children's personal development from being good at the last inspection to being outstanding now. The school has a good capacity to continue to improve.

The school's senior leaders and subject leaders work well together in evaluating the work of the school. Appropriate priorities for improvement are identified. However, the implementation of improvement strategies is not rigorously monitored so their impact is not accurately measured. The school uses the principles of best value well in deploying resources. Impact of the race equality policy is evaluated and informs planning of future work.

The governors are strongly supportive of the school. They fulfil their monitoring role but have insufficient input into developing the strategic direction for the school. Governors have a good grasp of the school's strengths but are less sure about its weaknesses and areas for improvement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Children

Inspection of Penkridge Middle School, Penkridge, Staffordshire, ST19 5BW

Following our visit to inspect your school, I am writing to tell you about our findings. I would like to thank those of you we spoke to for the friendly welcome you gave us. Your thoughtful responses to our questions helped us decide what is good about your school and what needs to be improved. The education you receive at your school is good.

These are the main strengths of your school.

- You really enjoy coming to school because you are well cared for and you get on very well with each other.
- Your personal development and well-being are outstanding.
- The range of clubs and activities you can choose to join in with is outstanding.
- The teaching you receive is good and enables you to achieve well.

There are several aspects of the school's work which we think can be better. In some lessons you are all given the same work to do even though some of you may be further ahead than others. Assessment of your work is inconsistent so that some of you are not clear about what you need to do to improve. I have asked your headteacher to take steps to make sure the work of teachers is more consistent and to check carefully that this is happening. You can help by following the guidance that your teachers give you on how to improve your work.

I wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

David Anstead Her Majesty's Inspector