

Penkford School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 104843 |
| Local Authority | St Helens |
| Inspection number | 308682 |
| Inspection dates | 30 April –1 May 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Adrian Simm |

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

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|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Community special |
| Age range of pupils | 9–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 55 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr David Crowther |
| Headteacher | Mr David Hartley |
| Date of previous school inspection | 14 June 2004 |
| School address | Wharf Road Newton-le-Willows Merseyside WA12 9XZ |
| Telephone number | 01744 678745 |
| Fax number | 01744 678748 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional inspector.

Description of the school

The school gained national specialist status in 2007 for teaching pupils with behaviour, emotional and social development, many of whom have severe behaviour difficulties. All pupils have a statement of their special educational needs. Prior to arriving, many pupils' attainment has been affected detrimentally by disrupted learning at their previous schools. Because of the learners' difficulties, many are working below national expectations. The school admits pupils from areas experiencing economic hardship. A very high majority of pupils are boys. All pupils are from White British backgrounds. The local authority looks after a very small number of pupils. The school has a number of national awards including Healthy Schools (2006); Dyslexia Friendly School (2006); Sportsmark and Activemark (2007) and Investors in People (reassessed 2007).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school where staff are enthusiastic, flexible and innovative in supporting the progress and development of pupils across the age and ability range. It offers good value for money. Parents, carers, pupils and other stakeholders consulted during the inspection feel staff genuinely have pupils' best interests at heart. Good leadership and management ensure the school is moving forwards with a variety of initiatives, many linked closely to the targets set as part of their specialist school status.

The headteacher and governors work effectively together. They ensure all staff are clear about their roles; they devolve responsibility to staff for the success of developments, which is checked on closely. As a result, managers at all levels work exceptionally well to improve the quality of care and education for all pupils. Some initiatives are well on their way such as the excellent partnerships the school has with other educational and medical professionals, agencies and vocational providers in promoting pupils' good learning and personal development. This is successful particularly in pupils' excellent understanding of living healthy lifestyles, of what they need to do to keep themselves safe and their economic well-being. The school works hard to maintain good attendance and behaviour for the majority. From the youngest pupils in the school, the vast majority show great willingness to overcome their behaviour difficulties. They develop extremely well in their independence skills and relationships with others. These are areas that have improved very well since the last inspection resulting in good personal development overall. Other initiatives, whilst started and developing effectively, have a way to go to fully meet the school's expectations, such as their vocational skills centre and a base within local mainstream to further aid inclusion. The school has made a good start on a broad range of fronts and has a good capacity to see them through to fruition.

Through a well designed curriculum, providing individualised learning and good pathway choices for the 14-16 year olds, and good teaching overall, pupils achieve well from their generally below average starting points. For example, there is a strong and increasing trend in pupils attaining Level 4 or higher in national assessments at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science. Also, those who stay at the school into Years 10 and 11 all achieve a good number of Level 3 Entry Level certificates in subjects such as English, mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT) and design and technology. Many succeed, subsequently, in full GCSE courses with 43% of pupils in 2007 attaining four or more passes with grades A to G. The pass rate has doubled in the last three years. Practical experiences predominate in lessons, matched to pupils' individual needs, including extensive use of computers and other technological equipment. In the main, learning is designed well to accommodate and overcome pupils' behaviour difficulties.

Whilst pupils' self-management of behaviour is a strength overall, the school is currently coming to terms with a small number of pupils with very severe behaviour difficulties who are reasonably new to the school. They find it particularly difficult to cope with a secondary school style, subject-based timetable. Steps are being taken to adjust teaching and learning even more for this group but there is further to go before this issue is fully resolved. Taking this issue into account, the school's care, guidance and support for pupils are good overall; all required safeguarding procedures are in place and the school's strategies for checking on pupils' progress are good and improving. One pupil commented, and other pupils echoed the sentiment, that 'this school is just what we need.it's the first school where I have been truly happy'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide effectively for those pupils with very severe behaviour difficulties who cannot cope fully with a secondary school style subject-based curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

School data show that once settled, pupils living at home or in the care of the local authority achieve well overall. For example, three quarters of the small group of Year 6 pupils in 2007 attained or exceeded their targets in reaching Level 3 or more in their national assessments in English, mathematics and science. Pupils also achieve well in other year groups so that by Year 9, around half of pupils reach Level 4 or higher in mathematics and science; the percentage is a little lower in English because of many pupils' aversion to reading and writing. This is, however, being overcome through work that has led to the school being recognised, for example, as a dyslexia friendly school and also, in working closely and very effectively with the local speech and language therapy service. By Year 11, gains made in learning and measured by GCSE success mean the school compares very favourably with other schools, including local mainstream secondary schools. On occasions, pupils achieve exceptionally well such as in 2007, when one girl gained five or more GCSE grades A to C. This success points to the very small number of girls not being disadvantaged in being placed at the school. In the last two years, the number of pupils gaining pre-NVQ level vocational qualifications has quadrupled and reached 50% of the pupils. Whilst the school appreciates this is good, they know there is more to do and are looking to extend vocational education as their specialist school initiatives take hold further, particularly in developing their own vocational skills centre.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Good behaviour and attendance by a high majority mean pupils have every opportunity to benefit from everything the school offers; pupils take their opportunities enthusiastically. As a result, their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good given their starting points. Pupils show a good capacity to get on together considering their previous major social and behavioural difficulties. Whilst break times and lunchtimes are well supervised, pupils generally control their own behaviour very well. There has been no need to exclude any pupil permanently from school. Short, fixed-term exclusions are used where necessary and a minimal level given the severity of some pupils' behaviour difficulties. Parents consulted during the inspection noted that the school works with them very closely in this respect. Healthy food choices are encouraged and pupils have an extremely good understanding of how this affects them. Older pupils have success, for example, on vocational placements and in representing the school on the local authority students' council. These examples attest to the good progress they have made in socialising, working without close school supervision and in making the right choices necessary in becoming young adults and make an excellent contribution to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Typically, the management of behaviour in lessons is very good. In the main there is a teacher and teaching assistant to each lesson. This ensures individual knowledge of, and support for, behaviour and learning. Invariably, lessons are very practical, make very effective use of ICT in which pupils are fully involved and which allow pupils to make realistic choices about their work and behaviour. Some teachers are excellent at this; and slightly better than others at modelling what is expected in lessons by working through a few examples with pupils. On occasions, therefore, a few pupils can be initially a little confused about what is expected of them. However, the fact that their behaviour and attitudes are not affected unduly at these times speaks volumes for what both staff and pupils have done in turning around their behaviour difficulties. On the whole, staff are clear about where pupils are up to in their work and set clear and challenging targets for the next steps in learning. Where the targets have been over challenging, the school is aware of this and is already working to ensure even greater consistency.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum that starts with the morning breakfast club for the younger pupils and extends across the whole-school day both in lessons and in optional activities at lunchtime, is linked closely with the school's reward system. These elements are integral to the very strong foundations laid by the headteacher and senior staff for improving the pupils' life chances. The curriculum is designed specifically to match pupils' ages and behaviour needs. For most, the curriculum reflects the style of a mainstream primary or secondary school curriculum, although in fully understanding how the pupils learn best, is designed to be motivational and practical. It is generally successful also because the high ratio of teachers and teaching assistants adjust the curriculum effectively on a day-to-day basis to support any hiccups in pupils' behaviour. Although more is to be done, vocational courses are developing well into strengths of the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff's high expectations of pupils based upon detailed knowledge of their social and behavioural needs, and where they are up to with their learning, lead to a generally calm and purposeful environment where pupils thrive. Members of the school council feel this has been a key area to improvement in the school in the last two years. However, the school is currently coming to terms with a small group of younger pupils with very severe behaviour difficulties who have not settled enough into the academic, subject-based curriculum normally operated for their age. In response, the school is in the process of setting up a 'nurture group' approach but has not yet decided fully how this will develop as the pupils become older. Procedures for ensuring all pupils are safe are in place. Staff vetting procedures are in line with requirements. The reward system contributes effectively to the good guidance and support particularly for pupils' personal development; staff operate it consistently and it ties together extremely well with all teaching activities. Pupils' academic progress is checked on well with targets set for development. This process is being refined further for even greater consistency in ensuring pupils meet or exceed a high majority of the targets expected of them. A large majority of parents responding to

school and inspection questionnaires consider the school provides, 'a safe and caring school which is magnificent in turning around pupils' behaviour'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's and staff's determination to transform the school from one supporting pupils with learning difficulties to a very child-centred, therapeutic yet academically rigorous environment for those with social and behaviour difficulties, has come a long way. This aspect of the school's development has been extremely well led. Effective support from senior staff and governors has resulted in good and improving provision for the pupils. Very effective multi-agency meetings to discuss pupils' further needs and support are a regular feature of school provision. The school is working hard towards its targets set for specialist school status. It has worked with a number of partner schools and universities in sharing and developing expertise. There is an atmosphere of celebration, with the pupils' needs first and foremost. The senior management team has first-hand knowledge of the effectiveness of lessons and support staff in strengthening their teaching. Subject coordinators are well on their way to becoming more responsible for managing all aspects of their subjects; they are playing their part in sharpening the target-setting process in checking even more accurately on pupils' progress. Teamwork from teaching assistants contributes significantly to the success of the school. Systems for self-evaluation work effectively and impact well in staff knowing what else needs to be done to improve provision further. Staff work extremely hard to make effective use of the resources available to maintain and improve school accommodation which is far from ideal for pupils with behaviour difficulties. This is why the school is working closely with the local authority in establishing how best to move forwards with more appropriate accommodation.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
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Overall effectiveness

| | |
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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 2 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 1 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| 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? | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 2 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 1 |

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

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| 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 | 1 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 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 | 2 |
| 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

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave me to your school this week, especially to the vice-chair of the school council who came to school an hour early on my first morning. He gave me a detailed and very enjoyable tour of the school, which set the positive tone for the two days of the inspection. You work extremely hard to achieve well both in your work and your attitude to learning in lessons. A number of you told me that you look forward now to coming to school for the first time in a long time. Parents I talked to and those who returned their questionnaires for the inspection are proud of you and the school in what you all have achieved together in turning around your lives.

I think your school is a good one and pleased that it is still developing. Whatever your age or ability, you are progressing well on work that your teachers prepare just for you. On occasions, you still find it a little frustrating but now you handle this far better than you did in the past. Some of your teachers are excellent at finding just the right activity to move you on to the next level of learning. These are frequently very practical activities that help you understand how useful your learning will be for you later in life. I think this particular strength of your learning, together with your understanding of keeping healthy and safe is outstanding. The older pupils now have good opportunities to show how good they are in achieving at Entry Level, GCSE and in vocational studies. At all ages, you are becoming independent learners so that you do not have to rely all of the time on adults to help you out. I know many of you recognise and appreciate everything that your headteacher and staff do to give you the chance to succeed.

In the main, the school has found ways to help each and every one of you. However, at the moment, a few pupils reasonably new to school are finding it difficult to succeed in their work and make relationships in the same way that most of you do. I have asked staff to look even more closely at ways of supporting these pupils. Also, to ensure that as they get older, the school can build success for them in the same way as they have for the majority of you. You could all help with this.