

Penketh High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111431
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	310597
Inspection dates	21–22 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Marguerite McCloy HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1356
6th form	131
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Holmes
Headteacher	Mr Barry Fishwick
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2004
School address	Heath Road Penketh Warrington Cheshire WA5 2BY
Telephone number	01925 722298
Fax number	01925 723812

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Penketh High is a large comprehensive school with specialist media and visual arts college status. It is situated in an area of average socio-economic circumstances and has a smaller than average size sixth form. The majority of students are of White British heritage and a very small number of students are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has an above average number of students who have a statement of special educational need as it facilitates 'enhanced provision' for 25 learners.

The school holds several awards including Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark Silver, Healthy Schools, Investors in Careers and Investors in People.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Penketh High School provides a good education for its students. It has some outstanding features, notably in its specialist status as a Media and Visual Arts College. This makes an excellent contribution to the school's curriculum and to students' personal development, including their outstanding contribution to the community. Recognised locally and nationally as a centre of excellence in media and visual arts, Penketh completed the first school-produced feature film 'Days' which was premiered during the summer. Almost half of the students were involved in some way in its production, for example as actors, extras or technicians.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher articulates a clear philosophy, which places the needs of the students at the centre of what the school does, and this is shared by the staff. Morale is high and a sense of pride in the school is evident in the positive attitudes and commitment of staff and students. The leadership team monitors the school's performance well, reports in detail to governors and takes action to bring about improvement. However, leaders and governors do not fully evaluate the impact of their actions to provide evidence of improvements in students' achievement.

Since the school's last inspection, attendance has improved, particularly in the sixth form, and is now good. Alongside the excellent provision for visual arts the school has rapidly developed its work in digital media since the designation of specialist status in 2005. The curriculum is now good, with the addition of a programme to ensure coverage of citizenship issues and personal, health and social education.

Parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed positive views about the education the school provides for their children. A typical comment made was that children, 'come to school happy and ready to learn'. Parents of Year 7 students particularly appreciate the transition arrangements that help their children settle quickly into secondary school life. Inspectors agree that the school provides an outstanding level of pastoral care for its students.

Students reach average standards of attainment, indicating satisfactory progress over time. However, the good progress students are now making in many lessons is helping to bring about steady improvement in standards.

Teaching and learning are good overall, although the school is aware of the need to increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching in order to improve achievement further. Students say that they make the best progress in lessons where they are expected to take an active part in their learning. Students are set learning targets and their progress is monitored, although this is not always effectively linked to assessment and marking systems. This leads to a lack of precision in students' knowledge of their current levels of attainment and of exactly what they must do to reach the next level.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is smaller than average, offering a GCE A-level programme with a specialism in media and the visual arts. Student numbers are increasing, although a number of students leave at age 17 to move on to employment or further vocational training. The sixth form supports students in making the most appropriate choices for their own needs, even if this means directing some students to courses provided elsewhere, or guiding them to relevant employment.

The sixth form provides good teaching and individual support for its students and, as a result, students who complete their two-year studies are making at least satisfactory and frequently good progress. The school is aware of some inconsistency in performance across the subjects at the end of Year 12 and is taking action to remedy this. Students reach average standards overall and in the specialist areas of media and visual arts standards are good. Students are well motivated and make particularly good progress on these innovative courses.

Students receive good support on entering the sixth form and later in making applications to university. Staff and students work well together. Students speak warmly of the time many staff put in to provide additional support and believe their teachers take pride in ensuring the good quality of provision. The sixth form has an 'adult ethos' and opportunities for personal development are extensive. These include the chance to: participate and take a lead in performing arts activities; to contribute to charity work; and assist in the wider community, including working with a local special school.

The school is endeavouring to develop good external partnerships. This will widen the breadth of subject choices for students and enhance the sixth form's viability.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching in order to raise standards.
- Use assessment information more effectively so that students are aware of exactly what they need to do to achieve their challenging targets.
- Improve the rigour and sharpness of the school's self-evaluation in order to measure the impact of actions taken to raise standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. This is a slightly different profile than at the time of the last inspection, when standards on entry were below average. As the school's test and examination results are in line with national averages, this represents satisfactory progress for most students.

The overall progress students make during their time in the school is improving. Provisional 2007 examination results show an increase in the proportion of students gaining five or more higher level GCSE grades in 2007. This is now just above average, although improvements are less marked in the number of students achieving this with both English and mathematics included. Students have been set challenging targets and this is assisting in continuing to raise standards in the school.

Students make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3, although this masks variations between core subjects, with English being better than mathematics and science. Test results in 2006 showed that students with a statement of special educational need, or receiving additional support for their learning difficulties and/or disabilities, made good progress.

Whilst the school has made most rapid progress in raising standards in GCSE examinations, there is again variation in results between subjects at this level. Standards are above average in a number of subjects, including the school's specialist areas of art, dance and drama. Most students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress, in particular where they receive additionally targeted support. Provisional 2007 results indicate that lower

ability boys made particularly good progress across both key stages. Very few students left the school with no qualifications. The school recognises that the progress made by the most able students, whilst satisfactory, needs to improve further.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of students is good overall and students' contribution to the community is outstanding. This is because they demonstrate a high level of social responsibility and participation in the many opportunities available to them. Many activities flourish, such as film-making, visual art projects, musical performances and whole school productions, as a result of students' willingness to become involved and to run aspects of them.

Students regularly raise money for good causes and some students have received awards for outstanding voluntary work. They take on responsibilities, for example, as school councillors, peer mentors or junior sports leaders. They have a good awareness of different cultures and beliefs through their personal education programme (Learning for Life) and they value the growing relationship with a partner school in South Africa. Such experiences support their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Students enjoy coming to school and have good regard for the safety and well-being of others. This is exemplified in their good attendance and behaviour, and by the positive attitudes to learning displayed by most students. Students reported that they are confident that staff will deal effectively with their concerns including freedom from bullying. They understand how to lead healthy lifestyles, they thrive in sports activities and have been involved in improving food provision in the school. The proportion of students taking up education and training after 16 is high and they develop good skills essential for work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Most teachers plan their lessons in detail. They have good relationships with their students and manage their classes well. Students behave well in lessons. Most listen attentively and are keen to contribute their own ideas. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are working together to develop their teaching, so that it better meets the needs of all students. Skilled teaching assistants know their students well and provide a good level of support for vulnerable students.

In the more effective lessons, teachers give students good opportunities to reflect on what they have already learned. They discuss the lesson objectives with students so that they know, in the words of one student, 'what the lesson is about'. Teachers challenge students, they provide opportunities for individuals or groups to contribute their own ideas and encourage them to assess their own and others' progress.

Students are developing good skills in information and communication technology (ICT) and say that many teachers now make good use of ICT to make lessons more interesting and understandable. The best lessons are characterised by an enthusiastic approach, thorough

knowledge of students' individual needs and a range of stimulating activities which motivate students to work hard and achieve very well.

In some lessons, although satisfactory, teaching is less effective because learning outcomes are not described explicitly and teaching activities do not match the needs of all students. As a result, some do not make the progress expected of them.

Occasionally a lack of pace and too much teacher input can lead to students losing attention and not making good progress. A lack of consistency in the marking of work also means that some students are not well informed of what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad and balanced. It enables students to enjoy learning so that they make satisfactory progress in literacy and numeracy and good progress in ICT. The school is looking to improve the provision at Key Stage 3 by integrating the teaching of subjects and by placing a greater emphasis on developing students' independent learning skills.

The school is justifiably proud of its Key Stage 4 provision. Students are guided to follow curriculum pathways that prepare them well for both academic and vocational post-16 courses, whether in the sixth form or to other options within the local area. There is a wide and very popular range of options within the school specialism of visual and media arts and a number of well-subscribed link courses with a local college. Students are expected to follow at least one ICT-based course and the school is playing a leading role in working with other schools to improve curriculum opportunities for all students in the local authority.

Since the school's last inspection, its provision for learning in citizenship has improved. The media specialism is being used to enhance this further, producing a series of short 'soap opera' episodes with citizenship themes incorporated. The school's own radio station is also being developed.

The curriculum makes good provision for students' personal development. It provides good opportunities for students to consider how they can develop healthy lifestyles and stay safe and the involvement of all students in Years 9 to 13 in the Junior Sports Leader Award scheme enables them to develop a good range of practical and leadership skills. The many activities at lunch-time and after school are well used by students to extend their learning and promote their physical fitness.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support for students are good and contribute well to their enjoyment and well-being. Health and safety procedures meet current government guidelines. Arrangements for the safeguarding of students are thorough and all staff receive regular training in child protection issues.

Parents feel that their children are well cared for and settle into school well. Older students who spoke to inspectors explained that they are happy with the support they are given when

choosing their courses. Many students talked positively about the advice and support given to them by the Connexions team based at the school. They also appreciate the help and advice they can access in the '4U2' advice facility and from learning mentors and support staff. Students have responded well to the introduction of a house system. They identify strongly with their 'house' and this enhances teamwork and supportive relationships between older and younger students.

The school provides an excellent network of integrated care, including strong links with a wide range of outside agencies, to meet the needs of all students. Teaching and non-teaching staff are deployed well, are highly qualified and highly committed. They work effectively together in order to target support to improve students' attendance, behaviour, emotional well-being, health and safety. As a result, care for students is outstanding.

The school prepares students well for work and further studies through comprehensive programmes of enterprise activities, careers guidance and links with local colleges and other schools. The school is currently developing systems to improve academic guidance in order to ensure that all students achieve as well as they can.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The impact of good leadership and management can be seen in a number of improvements in the school's provision and an emerging upward trend in achievement across the school. The leadership team has recently been restructured. Shared or 'distributed' leadership is promoted strongly and the range of skills and expertise on the team has increased the school's capacity for further improvement.

Media and Visual Arts Specialist status has had a significant impact on the school, which is seen as being at the cutting edge of developments in these areas. Leaders and all staff display a strong commitment to the specialism, which has helped to drive a number of improvements across the school as a whole. It makes a positive contribution to students' good personal development, including attendance, motivation and attitudes to learning. Annual art exhibitions and outreach work are highly regarded in the locality and by partner primary schools and a local special school. The school's media department is active in taking on commissions by the local authority and other partners to provide filming expertise in producing a range of DVDs, including for GCSE revision. It enhances communication with parents and the community through the school's website and newsletters.

There is a strong sense of teamwork and a commitment to further training and development in order to improve performance on an individual and whole-school level. Senior leaders monitor the school's performance well so that its strengths and weaknesses are accurately identified. A number of initiatives are put into place to bring about improvement. However, the school does not evaluate the effectiveness of its actions sufficiently to provide clear evidence of their impact on improving students' achievement.

Middle leaders are increasingly being held accountable for the performance of their departments. They understand the need to evaluate their work by using assessment information to track students' progress and to identify underachievement. In some departments of the school this

information is used well to identify and address weaker areas of learning, but this is not consistent.

Improvement planning is well targeted and resources directed towards where they are needed most. The school has been recognised as demonstrating good practice in the reform and development of its workforce due to its extensive deployment of support staff.

Governors fulfil their statutory roles and are generally aware of the school's strengths and areas where improvement is needed. They do not always provide sufficient challenge to hold the school to account for its performance.

Financial management is secure. Specialist college funding is used well to improve provision and help raise standards. The school provides good value for money and has good capacity for further improvement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
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	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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
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	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

Inspection of Penketh High School, Warrington WA5 2BY

Thank you for your courtesy and welcome when we visited your school. All of the inspectors enjoyed observing you at work and meeting with some of you during discussions.

Talking to students and reading parent questionnaires, we know that most of you are very happy at Penketh High school and we could see why. You go to a good school and sixth form in which the Media and Visual Arts Specialist status makes an outstanding contribution to your personal development, your contribution to the community and the curriculum on offer.

Although the standards you reach and the progress you make are satisfactory overall, we can see that this is improving because of good teaching and leadership. In many lessons, you are now making good progress and this will lead to further improvement in your test and examination results in the future. Contributing to this are your positive attitudes, behaviour and attendance, and the outstanding level of care that the school provides for you. Many students told us how much they appreciate the support and guidance you receive from all the adults who work with you.

To help you achieve the best you possibly can during your time at Penketh High, we have asked the school to look at the following areas for improvement.

- Make even more of the teaching good or outstanding so that you are challenged to make more rapid progress and reach higher standards.
- Ensure that all of you are aware of your specific targets for improvement and of exactly what you need to do to reach them.
- Sharpen up the way the school measures the success of actions it takes to bring about improvement.

You can help by making sure that you always get fully involved in your lessons, including questioning and discussion, so that teachers know exactly what you have understood and when you may need extra help or further challenge. Get to know your targets well and always aim to achieve or exceed them!

The inspection team were impressed with the extra opportunities you are given and how many students (and staff) show commitment to activities outside school hours or within the community: Sports, music, drama, art and media, for example. Your involvement and achievements in school productions, art exhibitions, workshops and trips, and in your feature film 'Days' are amazing experiences that many of you will remember for years to come.

Thank you again for your help during the inspection.