

Penn School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133586
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	316159
Inspection dates	4–5 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Blackband

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	66
6th form	9
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pat Bartle
Headteacher	Mrs Mary-Nest Richardson
Date of previous school inspection	3 May 2005
School address	Church Road Penn High Wycombe HP10 8LZ
Telephone number	01494 812139
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Penn school is a non-maintained day and boarding school for pupils with communication difficulties associated with hearing impairment, autistic spectrum conditions or speech and language difficulties. Most pupils are White British although about a third of the learners are from other ethnic backgrounds. British Sign Language, (BSL) is the first language for nine of the pupils with hearing impairment. There are currently 13 boarders. The school became non-maintained in 2001 when the Rayners Educational Trust assumed responsibility. The school was previously inspected as a non-maintained school in May 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. Pupils at Penn School make good progress in their learning and outstanding gains in their personal development and in the quality of their communication with others. The provision for boarding pupils is excellent and provides very good support for the pupils' learning. Parents are very happy for their children to attend the school, knowing that they will be exceptionally well cared for and that the school has a clear understanding of their child's needs. One parent's comment was typical; 'We are thrilled with our child's placement at Penn School'. Pupils feel secure and well supported. They learn extremely well how to remain healthy, to keep themselves safe and to take responsibility for their own behaviour. They value the school and this is evident through the very good relationships they have with staff and the good attendance of most pupils.

The majority of pupils enter the school with very low levels of attainment but they gain new motivation once at the school. Consequently, they quickly begin to make good progress. Most pupils, including the minority of pupils from other ethnic backgrounds, continue to achieve well in their studies and some make excellent progress. Pupils achieve equally well in the post 16 provision. Pupils develop very positive attitudes to learning and become confident in their ability to tackle new work. This underpins their good achievement. Teachers manage the pupils' behaviour exceptionally well and this is a significant strength of the school. The school has very effectively developed its provision for pupils with autism since the previous inspection and the provision is now outstanding. Some of these pupils make exceptional progress in their social awareness.

Teaching throughout the school and the post 16 provision, is good. Teachers have developed considerable expertise in overcoming the barriers to learning presented by the pupils' hearing impairments, autism and speech and language difficulties. The use of sensory integration techniques and procedures by trained therapists is exemplary. Lessons are generally interesting and well managed. The pupils enjoy their lessons and respond by trying their best. The procedures for the assessment and recording of pupils' progress are however inconsistent. As a result, teachers sometimes are not able to set sufficiently specific learning targets for each individual pupil. This in turn slows down the pace of learning. The effectiveness of educational support and guidance is also restricted because individual learning targets are in some cases not made clear enough for the pupils to understand. As a result, they are unsure about how to improve their work.

The curriculum is outstanding because the school makes sure every pupil is fully included in learning activities. Teachers and therapists from a variety of disciplines, work together in the creation and delivery of successful programmes to meet the wide range of the pupils' learning needs. The pupils' learning is enriched by the many opportunities they have to interact with the community. Older pupils receive good quality work related learning.

Since the previous inspection, the headteacher and senior staff have made substantial improvements to their procedures for monitoring and evaluating the school's work. As a result, they have a good overview of provision and clear plans for continuing school improvement. The governors of the school have improved the quality of their strategic management and they provide a good level of challenge and support to the school's leaders. The school is well set to build on the good progress made since the last inspection and there is a good capacity further to improve provision.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development. They are encouraged to make their own choices and to seek independence. The staff effectively promote an adult ethos and mature behaviour. The good teaching results in the pupils continuing to make good progress in their basic literacy and numeracy, their life skills and independence training, and in their grasp of work related learning. The school has developed good links with local colleges and almost all pupils leave for further education courses. The pupils are able to achieve their potential through a range of accredited qualifications. The provision is well managed since all staff work effectively together to ensure pupils achieve well.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 8

The boarding provision provides an exceptionally high quality of care, which is consistently higher than the National Minimum Standards. The pupils are very well supervised but at the same time, they have their privacy when appropriate. There are many leisure activities for the pupils and they all enjoy their stay in the provision. The support for the pupils' educational achievement is outstanding. There is excellent communication with teachers and consistency between them in their approach to behaviour management. Members of the multi-disciplinary team, such as speech therapists, work closely with residential staff in constructing care plans. As a result, the residential staff, in turn, are able to make a valuable contribution to the pupils' Annual Reviews.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish consistent procedures for the assessment and recording of pupils' progress so that teachers are better able to create sharply focused and challenging learning targets for them.
- Ensure pupils are clearly informed about how well they are doing and about how to improve their work further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Most pupils make outstanding progress when they first enter the school because they derive new confidence from the school's supportive ethos. The rate of progress remains good throughout their time in the school. There is no evidence of underachievement by any group of pupils. Because of their learning difficulties, however, most are not able to achieve the standards expected in mainstream schools and standards remain low in comparison with them. Hearing impaired pupils and those with speech and language difficulties, achieve well and the progress made by pupils with autism has improved substantially because of better teaching. Most pupils make outstanding gains in the quality of their communication. Many of the pupils with communication or speech and language difficulties gain a range of accredited qualifications at Entry Level. Most of these pupils achieve success in GCSE art. Some learning targets, however, are not written clearly enough and the pupils' achievement suffers as a result. The pupils make excellent progress in meeting specific targets for their personal development.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The pupils make excellent progress in all aspects of their personal development, particularly in their understanding of moral and social values. They develop very positive caring attitudes to pupils with greater need than themselves and this results in an excellent growth in their spiritual and cultural understanding as they value the wellbeing of all the other pupils and people they meet or hear about. Pupils respond very well to the challenging personal targets in their individual education plans (IEPs). As a result, they gradually develop a clear understanding of acceptable behaviour. Pupils know what is expected from them within the school's calm and supportive atmosphere. This is particularly important for pupils with autistic spectrum conditions, who generally make excellent gains in their self-confidence and ability to relate to others. Pupils are adamant that there is no bullying or intimidation at school and they feel safe. The pupils are very considerate, for example, to other pupils and staff. They make good use of the procedure called 'Listen-Up' where they may express their concerns. As a result, they feel their views are valued. They have an outstanding commitment to the school as a community in which they all share. Their good progress in basic skills and in work related learning means that they are very well prepared for when they leave school. Pupils are enthusiastic about their school and parents confirm that their children really enjoy their learning. This is reflected in the pupils' good attendance and very good attitudes to learning, both of which have a substantial impact on their achievements.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers consistently update their skills and several staff have gained a high level of expertise through studying for higher degrees, for example in autistic spectrum conditions. Individual pupils receive a very high level of support, both from teaching assistants and from trained therapists. As a result, pupils become much more confident in attempting new things and this has a positive impact on their achievement. Teachers and their staff, however, do not always effectively record all the small steps in the progress of each individual pupil and consequently sometimes they are not able to plan sufficiently challenging learning targets. All the pupils are able to take a full part in classroom activities because staff provide good visual clues and make good use of facilities to enable them to learn through sensory experiences. Pupils like their teachers and the support staff, and so respond well in lessons. Teachers are enthusiastic and as one pupil commented, 'The teachers have a lot of fun teaching us'. Pupils understand and respond well to the clear routines, and this assists in keeping a strong focus on learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is extremely well adapted to the needs of the pupils and thus all pupils are able to participate in learning activities. The curriculum is significantly enriched by the input of multi disciplinary teams of teachers and therapists who work closely together to devise personalised learning programmes for the pupils. The pupils enjoy the many after school activities, which help them in socialising, communicating and in their personal development. Basic skills provision is good and this, together with effective procedures to help older pupils to get ready for college, or work related training, ensures the pupils are very well prepared for life after school. The pupils develop an excellent understanding of the importance of healthy eating, physical activity and of how to keep themselves safe through the outstanding programmes in life skills, boarding routines and personal, health and social education (PHSE).

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

There are rigorous safeguarding standards, which ensure the school is a safe and happy place. The pupils make excellent progress in their social and moral skills through the excellent care and support from all staff members. This is an outstanding strength of the school. The high number of parents who returned questionnaires generally praised the school for its positive impact on their children's lives. However, teachers do not consistently make sure that pupils know how well they are doing or how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Since the previous inspection, the headteacher and senior staff have developed effective strategies to help them maintain improvements in teaching and the curriculum and pupils' achievement is better as a result. There are secure procedures to ensure that the pupils' progress is monitored and tracked and to make sure every pupil has an equal opportunity to do well. The school's ability to evaluate its own performance has significantly improved. For instance, although inconsistencies in assessment and target setting remain, leaders are aware of the need to improve procedures. Communication within the school is good and the high quality of professional training links appropriately to procedures for managing the performance of teachers and other staff. This has improved teaching and the pupils' achievement. The senior team are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching staff. As a result of good management the school has a very positive feel. The school uses resources well and gives good value for money. The governing body is more effective than at the time of the previous inspection and now provides an increasing level of challenge and support to the school's leadership.

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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?	2	2
The effectiveness of boarding provision	1	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	2

Personal development and well-being

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

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?	1	1
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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
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

19 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Penn School, High Wycombe, HP10 8LZ

When I came to your school recently, you made me very welcome and I enjoyed meeting some of you in the classrooms and at lunchtime. Thank you for your friendliness towards me and your excellent manners, and the way you helped me with my work. It is obvious that you all enjoy being there. I am pleased to tell you that you go to a good school, which does many things well. Here are a few of those things.

- The teachers encourage you to work hard and so you make good progress in your work, and excellent progress in learning to behave well and look out for other people.
- You have a very good range of activities, which help you to learn how to get on with each other and which teach you about the local and other communities.
- Lessons are interesting and you are well taught. This means that you enjoy learning and do your best.
- The older students amongst you have good opportunities to learn skills, which will be useful when you leave school.
- All the adults at the school look after you very well.

I have asked the school to look at two things, which I believe will further improve it.

- Your teachers should always make sure they know when you have made even a small bit of progress, so they can plan work that challenges you and helps you to learn faster.
- Make sure your teachers always explain clearly to you how to make your work better.

You can help too, just by going on working as hard as you have been doing and by continuing to support each other so well. Please thank your parents for their helpful comments.

Best wishes to you all.

Yours sincerely

Mel Blackband

Lead Inspector