

Pencalenick School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112084
Local Authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	325522
Inspection date	27 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Judith Goodchild

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

Boarding provision	
Social care URN	
Social care inspector	Jay Miles

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	110
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sheila Kent
Headteacher	Andy Barnett
Date of previous school inspection	28 September 2005
School address	St Clement Truro TR1 1TE
Telephone number	01872 520385
Fax number	01872 520385

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Introduction

Two additional inspectors and one social care inspector carried out this inspection.

Description of the school

The school provides for students who have wide ranging and complex communication and learning difficulties. Since the previous inspection, there has been an increase in the number of students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and more complex needs. There are nearly twice as many boys as girls. The school has a residential provision that caters for 19 full-time boarders and 8 respite care places. There are no students learning English as an additional language. The school successfully gained specialist status in communication and interaction in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Pencalenick School is an outstanding school. It was considered to be outstanding at its previous inspection. It has not stood still since then and has gained specialist status in communication and interaction. Through constantly reviewing and evaluating its work, it has made excellent progress against the issues identified for improvement at the last inspection. Its capacity to continue to improve is excellent. The boarding provision is good and meets the key National Minimum Standards, with some outstanding features. The school is led by a creative and innovative headteacher who is supported by a strong governing body. All staff in the school have a management responsibility and, together with the senior leaders, work as a highly effective team. Leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The holistic development of the individual student is the focus of the school's work. All students have a personalised learning plan that successfully addresses both their learning needs and their personal development. The personalised learning plans are very effective, enabling the school to identify quickly where additional support and focus are needed and where students need more challenge. This results in outstanding achievement for students when compared with their starting points and learning difficulties. Standards, however, are well below average due to the nature of students' learning difficulties.

There is a strong community atmosphere in the school and students feel able to express their views, whether it is about what could be done to improve their learning or improvements to the school. Last year, the school council successfully made a case for an adventure playground. Personal development, including behaviour, is excellent overall and attendance is good. The specialist school status in communication and interaction has played a major part in building students' independence and confidence through the development of their dance and drama skills. Students are actively involved in the wider community through dance and other performances with mainstream schools and regularly hold art exhibitions in galleries in Truro. Currently they are preparing an exhibition of photography. Younger students speak highly of the sense of freedom they feel and know they are making progress in their work. The many enterprise opportunities students take part in, such as the Dragons' Den, prepare them extremely well for their future lives.

Teaching is outstanding, as the excellent achievement of all students compared to their starting point bears out. Monitoring of teaching is rigorous and effectively links to an excellent staff development programme. There is a strong emphasis on developing teachers' skills in line with the changing school population and the school acknowledges that there is more to do in this respect. Teaching assistants are highly trained and work as an effective team alongside teachers. The curriculum provision overall, including enrichment activities, is outstanding. Exchange visits with a London school help students to develop a real awareness of life in multicultural Britain. Partnerships with other schools and colleges and local business are excellent. In response to the changing cohort of students, and the drive to make the learning experience even better, the curriculum has been changed so that it is flexible enough to meet the individual learning needs of each student.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The boarding provision at Pencalenick is good and meets the key National Minimum Standards, with some outstanding features. It supports and contributes to boarders' education and children

derive considerable benefit from the social opportunities it offers. Strong progressive leadership and effective links between the boarding and teaching staff support boarders' wellbeing. The headteacher and governors monitor boarding; the governors' representative visits regularly and their observations are constructive and helpful.

The boarding facilities are continuously being upgraded and there have been some significant improvements, particularly to the bathroom facilities and general homeliness. The provision of some single accommodation has helped to meet individual needs. The 'family style' arrangement of having both genders on each floor is well managed and helps boarders to develop a sense of community and respect for each other.

Progress has been made in respect of previous recommendations; the child protection record systems are significantly improved; bathroom and toilet doors have safety locks and there are showers with private changing space for older boarders. Work in progress includes developing a child accessible complaints policy, enhanced staff induction records and sourcing medication training. Staff support boarders' physical and mental health well. There are good opportunities for exercise and healthy eating and the children are encouraged to self-manage their personal hygiene. Staff assess and monitor children's health. They provide measured, sensitive care for children with specific health needs and seek advice and training where necessary. Staff are first-aid trained but parents' permission for first aid is not recorded. Although children are given all required medication, and medication systems are largely satisfactory, there is no formal quality assurance.

Children's safety is supported by a child protection policy and appropriate training. Both designated child protection leads are experienced and monitor any concerns. Staff employment and vetting procedures are based on current safeguarding guidance. Although there is clear evidence that the school strives for the highest standard of employment checks, there have been two uncharacteristic shortfalls. Other safeguards at the time minimised any risk to children.

Children's privacy and dignity are maintained and they enjoy having their own bedroom space. They have no lockable facilities but can give precious possessions to staff for safekeeping. The boarders can all identify a member of staff they can talk to if concerned. The children are helping to develop a child-friendly guide to boarding which will cover the complaint procedure. Risk of bullying and overly ebullient behaviour is effectively managed. One child specifically commented that he felt safe from bullying in the boarding house.

The children's ability to settle into boarding routines and accept boundaries varies but staff are patient and measured in their expectations. Their considerable experience and support arrangements help them to manage intense demands, improving a child's chances of sustaining and benefiting from a boarding placement. Staff achieve a commendable balance between allowing children to have fun and enjoying 'high jinks' while ensuring they know when to listen and take note. Sanctions are sometimes required but these are appropriate and recorded. Physical intervention is rarely necessary; staff are trained in de-escalation techniques which supports children's sense of security. The school's intervention records are detailed but have no prompt to record the duration of a restraint.

Boarders engage in an excellent range of activities and outings and, with supervision, are able to use much of the school's campus. Their safety is protected by risk assessment, and building security arrangements are excellent. There are written risk assessments regarding children's individual needs, their activities and fire safety. However, there are no written assessments of the regular checks made on the building and grounds. Staff with a health and safety remit are not specifically trained. Fire safety measures are addressed and fire brigade requirements met

but the regular fire drills are not recorded. Boarders benefit from consistent care from a well-established and experienced staff team. Staff are supported with training, supervision and staff meetings. Supervision covers individual training but there is no record to specifically assess the boarding department's training requirements. Boarders' records support their care arrangements but flexi boarders' records are less informative. However, any significant needs are identified in personal support plans. Quality assurance monitoring of records is facilitated by the head of care but there is no confirmatory record. These matters do not compromise children's well-being but do support quality assurance.

The children's artistic work and their comments show how much they value and enjoy being with the boarding staff. They appreciate each other as individuals just as the staff value and respect the children's individuality. This empowers children to communicate and express their views.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Children enjoy boarding; they like the social time with their friends, they enjoy the activities on offer and feel safe and well looked after. There is a happy, buoyant atmosphere. One boarder said, 'I think this is an excellent school. I don't think there is a better one.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the skills of all staff continue to be developed to meet the changing needs of the school population.

National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students' achievement is outstanding. The excellent progress all students make from their different starting points is particularly noticeable in Years 7 to 9. Here there is a very effective focus on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills that allows them to gain confidence in their ability to learn. A sense of pride in their achievements, such as reading a hitherto inaccessible book, was a joy to witness. This strategy provides a firm foundation on which to build as students move up through the school. All groups of students make equally outstanding progress. The specialist school brief for communication and interaction has made a significant contribution to the achievement of students. Students make excellent gains in confidence and independence skills, particularly through dance and drama. The move to an assessment system that is able to monitor and accurately track small steps in progress contributes significantly to celebrating as well as to recording achievement. This in turn motivates students to strive constantly to build on their previous success. The flexible curriculum and grouping arrangements ensure that all students are challenged to achieve highly, thereby contributing significantly to their excellent progress. By the end of Year 11 in 2007, all students were successful in gaining either Entry Level or GCSE accreditation in English and mathematics and 92% gained them in science. Students were similarly successful in 2008 and, additionally, 100% of students achieved an accreditation in information and communication technology (ICT). These results, together with accreditations from their college courses, demonstrate the excellent progress that students make.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The school is a very harmonious community to which all students feel a very strong sense of belonging. They are very proud of the school and the opportunities it gives them. They feel they are treated as individuals and have a 'sense of freedom', a new experience for some. Students are very confident to express their views on anything that affects their experience of the school whether it be the quality of their learning or improvements to the facilities of the school. They are consulted about future developments and have recently been fully involved in the design of the new toilet block. They have also successfully negotiated through the school council for an adventure play area. Healthy lifestyles are very clearly understood, including the need for regular exercise and the benefits of healthy food. Behaviour is excellent and students feel very safe and secure in school. Relationships with staff are excellent and students are happy to approach them with any concerns. Students really enjoy all aspects of school life. They particularly enjoy the dance and drama productions and are extremely proud of their artwork being displayed in local galleries. The exciting and engaging opportunities provided for students have led to increased attendance that has improved significantly and is now good. Excellent links with local businesses for work experience, and joint productions and lessons with mainstream schools and colleges effectively develop students' social skills and confidence very well. They develop a very strong awareness of their local community. Various enterprise activities, such as organising a Christmas stall for the main shopping mall to raise funds for the school, give students valuable real-life experiences. Students are very well prepared for life beyond school. Exchange visits with a London school give students an opportunity to observe at first hand the diverse society of Britain.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is outstanding, as the excellent achievement and personal development of all students compared to their starting point bears out. Planning is very thorough and closely linked to meeting students' individual needs and abilities. Very secure subject knowledge results in the very effective teaching of literacy and numeracy skills. As a result of the excellent gains students make in acquiring these skills, they quickly become confident learners. Excellent relationships help nurture students' excellent gains in becoming independent and confident learners. Questioning of students to assess their knowledge and understanding is a major strength and helps to extend their speaking and listening skills. ICT is very well used in lessons to support learning. Teachers make good use of the recently introduced assessment system. The celebration of small steps made in learning as part of the assessment process very effectively motivates students to try even harder. Teaching assistants are highly trained and work as a very effective team alongside teachers. Monitoring has identified there is a need to continue to develop teachers' skills so they can be more effective in supporting the learning of the changing student population.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Students enjoy a carefully constructed flexible curriculum that is very well adapted to their individual needs and effectively engages them in the learning process. The school acknowledges

that further development of provision will become increasingly necessary as the school population changes. There is an appropriate focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills in Years 7 to 9 which provides a firm foundation for students' future studies. The Key Stage 4 curriculum has recently been revised to ensure that it gives students the core skills necessary to access specialist courses, such as Creative and Media diplomas. Specialist school status has introduced both dance and drama to students and provides them with excellent opportunities to share both lessons and performances with mainstream peers. Personal, social, health and citizenship education is a significant strength throughout the curriculum and contributes very effectively towards the excellent personal development of students. There is a very strong focus on developing students' independence in both learning and living skills. Excellent opportunities to take part in enterprise activities reinforce students' independence skills, such as the recent Dragons' Den project for students in Years 7 to 9. The structure of the curriculum enables provision to be matched very closely to individual needs; for example, a Year 9 student is part of a GCSE photography class. This structure also enables additional support to be targeted very precisely to meet individual needs. Preparation for post-16 is supported through high quality work placements and a range of college and vocational courses and consequently students are well prepared for their future lives. The extended school and other enrichment activities offer students challenging opportunities through activities such as sailing and taking part in performances. Transport is provided for extended day activities to ensure all students are able to access these. Partnerships with other schools and colleges and local business are excellent and support the outstanding curricular provision.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support that students benefit from is outstanding. It is a major strength of the school and underpins the outstanding achievement of students. The highly effective pastoral team identify individual needs, including medical, when students join the school. Very effective partnerships with various support agencies ensure the needs of all students are fully met. Personalised learning programmes ensure that all staff effectively address both personal and academic needs. Transition into school is carefully structured with visits and meetings with parents and primary schools. Parents report a high degree of satisfaction with the school and the support they receive in supporting their children. In response to the more complex needs of the current Year 7, a nurture group has been set up so their specific personal and learning needs can be met. The school leads a highly effective Behaviour for Learning initiative, supporting students both within the school and in local mainstream schools. A similarly rigorous approach to transition is taken when students move into Years 9 to 11, with effective planning to ensure that students gain the skills necessary for their future lives. The guidance that students receive about their work and future options is excellent. An electronic individual learning plan is encouraging the development of independent learning skills, and students are able to monitor the progress they are making. Safeguarding procedures are robust and meet statutory requirements. There are effective links between the boarding and teaching staff that support boarders' wellbeing. Boarding staff support boarders' physical and mental health well. They provide measured, sensitive care for students with specific health needs.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school is led by a creative and innovative headteacher who is supported very well by all staff, each having a management responsibility, and by a strong governing body. Review and evaluation are the keystones of their work and all constantly strive to make what is already an outstanding school even better. The school has an excellent understanding of its strengths and development needs. The issues for improvement identified at the last inspection have been successfully addressed. The school's capacity to improve is excellent.

The holistic development of the individual student is the focus of the school's work and this has resulted in major changes to the curriculum that has taken into account the differing needs and rates of progress of the current cohort of students. All now benefit from a personalised learning programme and new assessment procedures are able to measure even the smallest step of progress that students make. The rigorous programme of monitoring teaching and learning is clearly linked to the continuous professional development of staff. The need to continue to develop the skills of staff in supporting the more complex learning needs of the changing intake of students has been identified as a priority for staff training. The school makes a significant contribution to promoting community cohesion and constantly strives to increase its impact. It has identified opportunities to further enhance students' awareness of the local and wider community, and also their decision-making skills and knowledge of democratic processes.

All staff and governors are involved in the self-review process and setting priorities for development. The governing body has an excellent understanding of the school and has established an effective working partnership that enables governors to challenge the school in an open and frank manner. They frequently visit the school, attend staff training sessions and have the skills necessary to carry out their role effectively.

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

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

28 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Pencalenick School, Truro, TR1 1TE

I am writing to let you know how much we enjoyed coming to visit your school. Thank you for making us feel so welcome and helping us during the school's inspection. Your school is excellent and all staff work hard to make sure that you make excellent progress in your learning and personal development. Here are some of the most important parts of the inspection report that we thought you might like to know about.

- The teaching that you receive is excellent and contributes significantly to the outstanding progress you make in your learning.
- The headteacher and all staff are committed to making your school an even better place and the work they do is outstanding.
- Your progress is monitored well and you are given excellent support and guidance when needed, both in your personal development and learning.
- You are given many opportunities to help you become young adults and to develop the necessary skills to prepare you well for life when you leave school.

To make the school even better we have asked the school to:

- ensure that the skills of all your teachers continue to be developed to meet the changing needs of students attending your school.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Judith Goodchild Lead inspector