

Penketh High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111431
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	356912
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Leszek Iwaskow 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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1377
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Holmes
Headteacher	Mr Jeff Hughes
Date of previous school inspection	21 November 2007
School address	Heath Road Penketh Warrington WA5 2BY
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited and observed teaching and learning in 37 lessons, delivered by 37 teachers; and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at school policies and procedures, safeguarding documentation, data and analysis about students' current and past performance, schemes of work, subject leaders' files, students' work, monitoring reports and 245 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- How effective management has been in raising overall attainment and achievement, particularly in mathematics.
- Whether teaching and the use of assessment were sufficiently good enough to accelerate students' progress, particularly in mathematics.
- Whether the curriculum was meeting the needs of all learners, particularly at Key Stage 3.
- How effectively the school was meeting the needs of those students who were potentially, or actually, disaffected.
- Whether management strategies were sufficiently effective in accelerating school improvement.

Information about the school

Penketh High School is a large comprehensive school with specialist media and visual arts college status. It 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 known to be eligible for free school meals is average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than average and the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is well above average. The school, also, facilitates designated provision for upto 12 students with cognition and learning difficulties. The school holds several awards including Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark Silver, Healthy Schools, Investors in Careers and Investors in People status, as well as the International Schools Award. The 'Fun out of School Club', which uses the school premises, is inspected separately.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Penketh High School is facing a period of rapid change and currently provides a satisfactory education for its students. The headteacher has identified the complex nature of the changes required to improve the school and he has a clear vision for the school's future. He has begun to drive through changes to boost achievement, focusing rightly on raising the quality of teaching and learning. He has the support of the staff and students who recognise the improvements he has put in place since his appointment over a year ago. Systems have been established to make the school more aware of its own strengths and weaknesses and appropriate training for staff is being undertaken so that they can contribute to monitoring and accelerating students' performance. There is strong evidence of continuous improvement in relation to the school's specialism but in other areas improvement has been slower and effective monitoring is at an early stage of development. Some managers are new to post, are relatively inexperienced and have not yet developed all the requisite skills. As a result, despite the improvements identified, the capacity for improvement is judged to be only satisfactory.

Although attainment in GCSE examinations has been below the national average for the previous three years it has risen steadily since 2008. The school achieved its best ever GCSE results in 2010 and there is evidence from students' current work that improvement will be maintained. Students, including those in the sixth form, do very well in the arts and media where the school has an international profile. However, standards in mathematics remain below average, though improving. Evidence from lessons across the school, shows that where students' needs are recognised and appropriate challenge is provided, good progress is made. In a minority of lessons, the level of work is wrongly pitched and progress slows. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive appropriate support and they make progress, which is at least as good as that of their peers. Boys do not achieve as well as girls; the school recognises this issue and works hard to motivate and support students who are at risk of becoming disaffected.

Some improvements are more immediately evident. Attendance is now good, behaviour is satisfactory and improving and students feel well cared for and safe. A Year 7 student commented that her form tutor was 'like a guardian angel' who had helped her through the transition from primary school. This culture of care continues throughout the school. The school offers a generally broad curriculum and works well with partner organisations to provide varied accredited courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. More innovative changes to the curriculum at Key Stage 3 are being reviewed to ensure that any changes made are relevant to the students and in their best interests. Students

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value the good range of extra-curricular activities offered by the school and feel that they are part of a strong community. Their understanding of the international community has been enhanced by an innovative media project establishing firm links with South Africa. The school is aware that it needs to build on this to develop better understanding and appreciation of the complex, multi-racial nature of British society. The school is at a crossroads in its development. There is a changed culture and clear desire to improve provision and outcomes for students. As several of them commented, 'we can see things are changing and being done different now'. This new mood of optimism is evident in gradually improving results and is increasingly being shared by the whole-school community.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate progress and raise attainment across the school and especially in mathematics, by:
 - – building on good practice to increase the proportion of good or better teaching
 - – recognising the different needs of students, particularly boys, and tailoring lessons to meet these needs more effectively
 - – providing all students with sufficient challenge and support to achieve their best
 - – improving the consistency and accuracy of assessment so that students are clear about what they need to do to improve
 - – focusing on students' acquisition of basic skills in literacy and numeracy to enhance learning across the full range of subjects.
- Improve the quality and accountability of leadership and management at all levels, by:
 - – developing the skills of all leaders so that they can accurately identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning and take the necessary action to tackle under-performance and share good practice
 - – ensuring that improvement planning includes clear success criteria and that progress against these is regularly reviewed, evaluated and communicated
 - – ensuring that learning programmes are planned to progressively develop skills, acquire knowledge and promote understanding.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students enter the school with attainment and skills which, overall, are close to the national average. Over the last two years, there has been a continuing and gradual upward trend in students gaining five or more grades A* to C in GCSE examinations. Scrutiny of students' work, along with available current data, confirms this trend and overall attainment is now nearing the national average. However, the picture remains complex with students performing particularly well in the specialist media and visual arts

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subjects and less well in more academic subjects. There still remain weaknesses in certain areas which nevertheless do not detract from an overall upward trend. Standards in mathematics were low but have improved. However, they still remain just below the national average. Most students make satisfactory progress. Those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those known to be eligible for free school meals make at least satisfactory progress. Girls are making more effective use of the opportunities that the school provides and are generally making better progress than the boys.

Students generally have positive attitudes in and enjoy most lessons, especially when they are provided with appropriate tasks and guidance and are engaged by the activities offered. They are particularly appreciative when they are able to utilise and develop practical skills or when they can interact with each other and the teacher. For example, in a good French lesson students were eager to speak. They consolidated previous learning linked to changing the meaning of sentences about healthy living by using different nouns or introducing negatives. A mix of humour, visual stimulation and paired work enabled students to develop good speaking skills. In contrast, progress was stifled and students were less motivated when lessons were dull, too easy or dominated by the teacher. Most students know what is expected of them. They are orderly around the school. However, the quality of students' behaviour deteriorates, especially in those few lessons where teaching does not capture their interest or meet their learning needs. Older students confirmed that, although there is some disruption and poor behaviour in a minority of lessons, this has improved over the last couple of years. Relationships around the school are positive and students are welcoming. Younger students spoke positively about the way they were helped to settle in by both older students and adults. There are few incidents of bullying. Students know who to go to if they are in difficulty and they appreciate the wide range of staff they can turn to. However, they are less confident that issues will be resolved effectively. Students are aware of the need for rules and the consequences that result from their actions. They take on a variety of roles and responsibilities within the school. Their involvement in a wide range of activities linked to the school specialism supports their links with both the local community and further afield. In particular, their media work with Kwadeda High School in Soweto, South Africa has gained both national and international recognition.

Students show positive attitudes to leading healthy lifestyles. They are actively involved in promoting healthy diets in partner primary schools and influencing their peers to give up smoking. Most students understand the need to stay healthy, many choose to do so and also take part in regular extra-curricular sporting activities. The school has made attendance a focus and this has steadily improved and is now good. However, moderate literacy and below average skills in mathematics means pupils are only satisfactorily prepared for their future working lives. Students' spiritual moral and social development is enhanced through the 'Learning for Life' curriculum. The arts and media specialism supports their creative and cultural development. Despite the high profile link with South Africa, opportunities for students to mix and learn from students from differing ethnic backgrounds are more limited.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Although good and outstanding teaching and learning were observed, overall they are satisfactory and there remain pockets of poorer practice. Despite behaviour improving, a few lessons are affected by a small number of disruptive students, usually boys. In the best lessons observed, planning clearly identified the sequence of teaching and learning activities, questioning encouraged thinking and challenged students. Relationships were positive and students were good humoured, but respectful. As one student stated, 'the best lessons are those with a lively banter – but we also do as we are told'. Teachers were responsive to students' needs and adjusted lessons accordingly. In one English lesson, the teacher noted through skilful, interactive questioning that students already had a good understanding of a particular concept. He quickly confirmed 'Well you obviously understand this – let's move on to something new and more interesting'. Weaker lessons tended to focus on the teaching rather than the learning and were more teacher dominated. In these lessons, teachers did not make effective use of visual resources, including multi-media, and students were often unclear how to access the task. Consequently, in the weaker lessons, students were often compliant and passive

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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and a minority would be inattentive.

In too many lessons, too little attention was paid to students' literacy skills through the development of writing or the correction of spelling and general grammatical errors. Weak presentation and unfinished work often hampered progress, especially among boys. Apart from in the very best lessons, there was a distinct lack of evidence that teachers were setting work which was appropriate for students of differing abilities. Often top sets would also be taught in the same way, with the same resources and teaching approaches as those used in the lower sets.

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. Provision in the specialist subjects such as art, media and dance is excellent and is making a strong contribution to students' experiences. There are also appropriate pathways for students in examination classes, including those enabled by partnerships with other education establishments. The 'Learning for Life' curriculum is well developed and relevant and has resulted in increased attainment in religious education and especially citizenship. The school offers a good range of extra-curricular opportunities, especially those linked to the school specialism, but also encompassing sport and enterprise. These are well regarded by students, parents and carers and the community. A small minority of parents and carers expressed concerns that there is too great a focus on media and the arts rather than on more academic subjects. The school recognises that the Key Stage 3 curriculum is currently acknowledged as being work in progress. The school is adapting it to enable personal learning and thinking skills to be more firmly embedded in more lessons, in order to better take account of students' needs and encourage more independent learning. The school acknowledges that there are gaps in some areas and currently, despite ensuring broad coverage, there is insufficient time to teach history and geography in sufficient depth. Also, schemes of work do not always indicate planned progression in the acquisition of skills and knowledge. The projected curriculum model, includes a compressed Key Stage 3. This presents a significant challenge in curriculum organisation, which the school is currently not fully equipped to address given its other more immediate priorities to improve learning and achievement.

The school goes to great efforts to ensure that students are cared for well. The '4U2' area provides well organised and wide-ranging services that monitors and meets students' pastoral needs quickly and effectively. The pastoral structure supports students well. Transition programmes into and throughout the school are well established. They help younger students to settle in and prepare them well for their future life within and beyond the school. Personalised programmes for work experience help to motivate students, encourage good attendance and improve their drive to achieve. The school has excellent links with a wide range of external agencies that are used very effectively to diagnose learning, functional and medical issues. These are also used well to provide support and advice for parents and carers, especially of the most vulnerable students. There are clear systems in place for target setting and tracking of students' progress. The school is aware of the need to use this data more effectively to analyse the impact of its work for specific groups and to ensure it is improving academic achievement. While this data are used effectively to identify and monitor progress,

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assessment data are still not used consistently enough in all classrooms to support learning.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher on taking up post less than two years ago, identified the need to improve teaching and learning in order to raise standards. He considered that there was also a lack of rigour in monitoring provision by managers at all levels and a need to change the culture of the school to be more receptive to change and accountability. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school which is now shared openly across the staff. Strengths and weaknesses are generally recognised and structures and systems to improve the school have been put into place. However, these are not yet sufficiently developed at all levels to ensure consistency across all subject areas and aspects of school life. Strategies are in place for the improvement of teaching and learning and most lessons now have a common structure for planning. However, the monitoring of what goes on in the classroom is not yet sufficiently developed to help drive up the quality of teaching, attainment and progress across all areas. Although progress has been made in improving attendance, behaviour and raising overall standards, weaknesses remain, notably in mathematics. Leadership and management of specialist subjects is strong, leading to positive outcomes. However, the managers in several other subject areas are relatively inexperienced or new to post.

The governing body is supportive and committed to the school and has a satisfactory understanding of the main issues but there has been insufficient challenge on the relatively slow progress in improving some aspects. The school communicates well with parents and carers and they are kept informed about events and their children's learning and progress. However, in replies to questionnaires, a significant minority felt that the school did not take account of their suggestions. The school has forged extensive partnerships, which make very good contributions to broadening students' experiences through the school's specialism. Media projects, such as the feature film 'The Opportunity', have gained national and international acclaim.

Clear procedures and practices are in place to ensure and promote satisfactory safeguarding. All required duties are met. Policies are being reviewed to make safeguarding even more robust. The school pays very good attention to vetting staff and ensures that high quality training is in place. Staff and students know who to go to with

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concerns.

The school's promotion of equal opportunities is satisfactory. There are strong support systems in place for the most vulnerable students, although boys' relative underachievement is less well challenged. Students' understanding of their own sense of identity is developing. They are proud of their school and their community. They demonstrate empathy for those from a different culture but have limited experiences of the rich diversity of the multicultural country in which they live. Overall, the school promotes a satisfactory education for most of its students and gives satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The sixth form is small and outcomes for the great majority of students are satisfactory. Most students make at least satisfactory progress and those who opt for the school's specialist subjects often make good progress. Students taking more academic subjects are less successful, although the very small numbers involved make it very difficult to identify trends. As they progress through the sixth form, students develop a sensible and mature attitude to their own well-being and that of others. They develop greater independence in their learning. This prepares them well for higher education or future employment. Students contribute well to the life of the school and are increasingly involved in the wider community. The school attempts to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, but the small numbers involved at times makes it economically unviable to support or provide some courses. The curriculum is adapted each year to meet the needs of all students as well as possible. Good care, guidance and support enable

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students to prepare well for the next stage in their lives. The head of sixth form has a clear view of the changes needed to expand and improve provision. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but the quality of teaching varies dependent on which option is chosen. Strengths in the specialist areas, including drama, dance, media and art provide a strong basis for students to develop practical and creative skills but few opt for the more academic alternatives. The students enjoy school and speak well of the support and guidance they receive.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Nearly a fifth of parents and carers returned questionnaires. Most of these were positive about the school, the progress their children were making and the care the school provided. The majority were supportive, although concerns were raised about communication between home and school. An equal number wished they received more help in supporting their child's learning. Individual parents and carers raised concerns about lack of homework and behaviour in some classes. Inspectors identified that poor behaviour was an issue in a small minority of lessons.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Penketh High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 245 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1377 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	85	35	138	56	17	7	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	77	31	154	63	9	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	67	27	143	58	18	7	4	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	59	24	152	62	12	5	8	3
The teaching is good at this school	67	27	142	58	23	9	4	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	54	22	131	53	35	14	6	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	13	147	60	38	16	11	4
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	51	21	146	60	21	9	3	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	58	24	149	61	24	10	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	66	27	136	56	18	7	6	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	37	15	146	60	31	13	7	3
The school is led and managed effectively	58	24	145	59	15	6	6	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	85	35	125	51	14	6	10	4

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



20 September 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Penketh High School, Warrington, WA5 2BY

Thank you for making me and the other inspectors welcome in your school. We enjoyed talking to you about your experiences in lessons, what you enjoyed and how you were treated and looked after. You frequently asked us what we thought about your school and this letter is to tell you what we have found. We observed lessons, talked to you and your teachers and looked at range of work and documentation. This led us to the conclusion that your school currently provides you with a satisfactory education.

Although your school does many things well, there are other aspects which still need to be improved in order to make your stay in the school a much more rewarding experience.

You are proud of your school and the recognition it has received as a media and visual arts college. You clearly enjoy and achieve very well in the various subjects linked to this specialism. Although overall results are gradually improving, you are currently doing less well in some of the more academic subjects, especially mathematics. You remarked that although behaviour is improving there are still a small number of lessons where you are not able to work because of the disruptive behaviour of a few students. You particularly enjoy practical lessons, especially utilising media and the arts where you can show and develop your talents. However, you also find some subjects more mundane and less interesting. We have asked the teachers to improve lessons in areas such as mathematics, where standards could be higher. The school will seek to ensure that learning in all classes has appropriate levels of challenge in order to push you to get the highest grades possible. We have also asked the school to look carefully to ensure that learning is meaningful and relevant for you all. The headteacher, and other school managers, will monitor lessons more regularly and rigorously to ensure that these improvements are taking place.

If the school is to improve and become a good school you must also play your part and try hard in lessons, particularly in the more academic subjects. Some of you will also need to make a greater effort to improve your work and presentation and not let the small minority of disruptive students spoil your life chances. With your help and cooperation I am sure the school will continue to improve, but at a much faster rate. On

behalf of the inspection team, I wish you all the best for your future lives and careers.

Yours sincerely

Mr Leszek Iwaskow

Her Majesty's Inspector

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