

Penkford School

Wharf Road, Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside, WA12 9XZ

Inspection dates

2–3 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' academic standards upon entry to the school are low compared to national averages. Since the previous inspection, most have made insufficient progress, particularly in English, to close gaps in their learning.
- Until very recently, leaders and managers have not used sufficiently effective measures to ensure the quality of teaching improves.
- Some of students' behaviour in classes is not yet consistently good enough.
- New courses of study have not yet all been introduced.
- The rates of students' absences and exclusions remain at too high a level. Furthermore, some staff rely too often on physical interventions and restraints because the new behaviour policy has not been fully implemented.
- Leaders and managers at all levels have not ensured that the environment of the school consistently encourages students to learn.
- Over time, the governing body has not ensured that the school is held fully to account and that all of its statutory duties are completed in a timely manner.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and managers are becoming more proficient in using the information gathered about how students learn. This indicates that for most groups their rate of progress is rapidly becoming closer to national expectations, particularly in reading.
- The rigorous performance management systems introduced in the last year by the new headteacher have led to the quality of teaching improving rapidly.
- Students who attend regularly are positive about the school and report they feel safe and value the work of the staff in caring for them.
- The good guidance and support of staff helps to ensure that most students are prepared for moving on to the next stages of education, employment or training.
- The new governing body is now holding the school to account. It is rapidly gaining in effectiveness and is bringing appropriate challenge and support to the school.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed seven lessons given by six teachers, two of which were undertaken jointly with the headteacher. They spent more than three hours in classrooms and visited two vocational centres to ensure that students are safe and that their courses are appropriate.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders, middle managers, teachers, members of the governing body, the school’s educational psychologist, a member of the police force who works closely with the school, one representative of the local authority and one external consultant. Inspectors spoke with three parents. They met with students formally and informally throughout the inspection.
- Records of teachers’ planning were scrutinised as were other important documents concerning safeguarding, the curriculum, records of students’ achievements and their progress, and plans for the future development of the school.
- There were insufficient responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) but 10 questionnaires returned by staff were taken into account.

Inspection team

Terry McKenzie, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Doreen Davenport

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Penkford School provides places for primary and secondary-aged students. All have a statement of special educational needs in respect of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- Almost all students have a White British heritage and for all currently, their first language is English.
- Almost all students are entitled to support provided by the pupil premium (additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, from service families and those looked after by the local authority). There are very few girls.
- The school operates a centre for vocational learning situated in Moorfoot Road, WA9 2DY a few minutes drive from school. Currently a very few students also attend Fullagars alternative vocational provision at Lea Green, WA9 4TR.
- The new headteacher was appointed in September 2012 and at the same time the governing body underwent a thorough reorganisation with the appointment of several new members, a new Chair of the Governing Body and new vice-chair. Recently, new middle management posts have been created in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers at all levels must continue to improve students' rates of attendance and their academic progress by:
 - ensuring teachers provide lessons that are always interesting and accessible to students of all levels of ability
 - improving the teaching and learning areas of the school even further through the use of imaginative displays that provide information and celebrate students' work
 - continuing to develop the curriculum to provide highly personalised pathways of learning for reluctant students.
- Senior leaders must ensure that behaviour continues to improve, the rate of exclusion is further reduced and the use of physical restraint diminished by supporting staff to fully implement the school's behaviour policy.
- The governing body must ensure that it continues to improve its effectiveness so that the school's managers are appropriately supported and challenged, and all statutory duties are undertaken in a timely fashion.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Almost all students arrive at the school having experienced periods of great disruption in their lives. Many have not attended school regularly.
- For most, and for older students in particular, their literacy and numeracy skills are weak upon arrival. Nevertheless, many settle quickly and respond to the supportive environment that encourages them to manage their behaviour and take part in lessons.
- In Key Stages 2 and 3, there is increasing evidence that students are making progress in accordance with national expectations. However, the school cannot yet demonstrate that good progress have been sustained over a long enough period of time for students' achievements to be good.
- In Key Stage 4, many of the students have lower expectations than their younger colleagues because they arrive very late in their school career. Often, the school is required to undertake prolonged periods of work to bring these highly disaffected students to the point where they will take part in school life.
- Penkford has started to provide a wider range of curricular activities designed to capture the imagination of reluctant students and motivate them to achieve. Vocational opportunities are available and the school has organised an imaginative enrichment curriculum that takes place during some afternoon sessions, after school and occasionally in holidays. Nevertheless, more should yet be done to provide individual pathways of learning for students to encourage them to come to school and take part in lessons.
- Except for the older and younger students, there is no discernible difference in the rates of progress made by different groups. The pupil premium funding supports almost all students. Managers have spent the money wisely on services designed to help students overcome their emotional and social difficulties so that they can learn more effectively and make progress in lessons.
- School records indicate that particular gains have been made throughout the last year in the development of students' reading. However, until recently the school has not had a specialist English teacher and as a consequence students have acquired knowledge, skills and understanding in English more slowly than in other subjects.
- A wider range of opportunities is being provided for the most able of the older students through the introduction of more GCSE courses. During the inspection, mathematics was taught effectively so that students in primary and secondary are improving their skills in number work.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Much of the teaching seen during the inspection was good or better. However, a significant proportion remains at too low a standard and must be improved as a matter of urgency.
- In some lessons, students complain that there is not enough to do and that the subject matter is not interesting enough. Here, students make little progress and their behaviour often becomes unacceptable.
- Very few teachers make sufficient use of good displays throughout the school. Consequently, students' work and their efforts are rarely celebrated and there is little opportunity for them to be proud of their efforts. Many areas of the school such as the corridors are very bare. This lack of stimulation does little to promote students' enthusiasm for learning.
- When students talk about their own learning, they describe the inconsistency in the quality of teaching. Students report that their behaviour is at its best when lessons are interesting. Those who have previously struggled to attend regularly state that when lessons are worthwhile it is a great incentive for them to come to school and take part.
- The new headteacher has introduced robust systems of performance management during the

last year and these are beginning to take effect in improving the quality of teaching, but these strategies have not yet become fully embedded.

- In the best lessons, teachers make use of a wide variety of resources designed to capture the imagination of students. They ensure that the pace of lessons is matched perfectly to students' levels of concentration so that they do not become bored or frustrated.
- Plans are now in place for the skills of outstanding and very good teachers to be passed to others. This will ensure that where teaching requires improvement teachers will have a better idea of how to make their lessons more accessible to reluctant learners who operate at different levels of ability.
- A recognisable improvement in teaching throughout school has been in the use of phonics (the sounds that letters make) to aid the development of students' reading. All staff including teaching assistants have undertaken training recently and as a result, there is more consistency in the way they support students to read in all lessons throughout the curriculum.
- In some lessons throughout the curriculum, teachers plan to include mathematics which is designed to enhance students' skills in the use of numbers in everyday life.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Overall, the behaviour and safety of students requires improvement. This is because the initiatives introduced by the new headteacher, such as the introduction of a behaviour management policy, have not yet been fully implemented into the work of all staff and, therefore, the complete impact has not yet been felt. Almost all students have experienced extreme difficulties in previous educational placements. Most have not attended regularly and all have a statement of special educational needs relating to behavioural and emotional and social difficulties.
- Following enrolment here some, particularly younger students, respond positively to the high quality care and support of staff. They are grateful for the positive relationships they make with staff that encourage them to moderate their behaviour. The consequence of this is that many become capable of taking part in lessons and making progress in learning.
- Nevertheless, where lessons are less interesting and teaching is not as effective as it should be, students' behaviour too often slips and occasionally serious incidents occur as a result.
- For those who attend regularly the successes they gain in the classroom encourage them to become more confident and undertake a range of activities. Some are keen to operate in a more work-based environment and attend courses of vocational training. Others enjoy the extra – curricular activities and outdoor education and find these aspects of the school very motivating.
- For most, their attendance improves rapidly following entry and attendance appears to be increasing from last year to this. However, the school has not yet provided a sufficient range of curricular opportunities to encourage high levels of attendance, and too many students are absent from school without good reason.
- Students report that they generally feel safe in school and that there is very little bullying or harassment because staff are always present to help sort out any difficulties. The parents spoken with during the inspection agreed that their children are safe here.
- The strong partnerships that the school enjoys such as with the police encourage many students to begin to respect authority and understand more about right and wrong. The gains in spiritual, moral, social and cultural education (SMSC) are supported by the initiatives designed to enhance students' emotional and social well-being that are funded by the pupil premium.
- When meeting with the student council, inspectors were very impressed that the representatives demonstrated high levels of social skills. They were a credit to the school.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Following the appointment of the new headteacher in September 2012, a great number of

changes were introduced, designed to move the school from focusing on students' behaviour to being more concerned with their attainments and progress. However, many of these new initiatives have not yet been fully implemented and, therefore, leadership and management requires improvement.

- The headteacher's analysis of the school is largely in line with the findings of the inspection and her plans for future development of the school are based on this accurate understanding. Nevertheless, these plans remain at an early stage of implementation.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent but has improved in a relatively short time because of the introduction of robust systems of performance management that are being linked to teachers' pay through, for example, the establishment of new key posts in the school. Teachers have received training in planning for better quality lessons and there has been a greater emphasis on literacy in classrooms through using phonics.
- Leaders and managers have not yet ensured that the school can show that most students make good progress. However, students are beginning to achieve more in lessons. Consequently, the school is now better placed to help them fill in the gaps in their learning and begin to catch up with peers in mainstream schools.
- New systems are in place capable of measuring the progress that students make in classes. Managers are devising ways of making this information more readily available to teachers to use when planning the next steps of learning.
- The school now measures the rates of attendance more accurately and when students are absent managers ensure that they know where they are. Parents are now constantly encouraged to ensure that their children attend school.
- Increasingly the curriculum is being used to encourage students to attend more regularly. The wider choice and range of subjects has been supported by the new Primary School Sport funding for physical education. Swimming has been added to the timetable as a new venture designed to encourage reluctant primary-age pupils to take part in physical activity. The physical well-being of secondary students is encouraged by activities such as canoeing.
- Better systems for managing students' behaviour have been implemented. Consequently, students report they feel safer, there are fewer incidents and the numbers of physical restraints and exclusions have already reduced. Students and staff report that behaviour is improving rapidly. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is often good and some students demonstrate good personal development. Nevertheless, greater consistency in implementing the behaviour management system is required by staff.
- The local authority has provided long-term support to the school so that the new headteacher and new members of the governing body have benefited during their periods of induction.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body was reformed in September 2012, following a period when governance was mainly undertaken by a small but dedicated group of governors. They, despite their best efforts, found it almost impossible to undertake the full range of statutory duties throughout that period of time. However, the new governing body now offers increasing support and challenge to senior leaders. Some of their work involving statutory duties has not always been completed at the due times but members have taken steps to put this right very recently.
 - Members of the governing body are becoming effective in supporting the headteacher in redefining the management structure of the school and ensuring that salaries are linked to responsibilities and the quality of teaching. Members are gaining understanding of how the pupil premium funding should best be used for those for whom it is intended and the effect that it can have on students' progress. They have ensured that all of the requirements for safeguarding are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	104843
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	426050

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	8–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	45
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Beverley Boyer
Headteacher	Julie Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	29 September 2010
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