

Penn Fields School

Boundary way, Penn, Wolverhampton, WV4 4NT

Inspection dates 4–5 December 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make excellent progress in their personal development and behaviour. They make good progress in subjects and outstanding progress in their skills in speaking, listening and communication and in using computers.
- Strong safeguarding arrangements enable pupils to feel extremely safe and to have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe.
- Teaching is good. It is improving because senior staff and local authority advisers check on it regularly and provide good training for staff.
- Teaching assistants have had good training and their skills are used well to strengthen learning in lessons.
- The new sixth form is good and improving students' ability to work on their own and helping them to prepare for life after school.
- School leaders have led the school well through the move to the new school and quickly established an excellent atmosphere for learning. They and governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.
- The school checks on pupils' progress well and is quick to give extra support to those whose progress is slowing.
- Funding has been used well to provide support for individual pupils, as well as additional clubs and therapies such as counselling, play therapy and anger management. The impact can be seen in pupils' improved behaviour and progress in reading.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- While there are examples of outstanding teaching, not enough is outstanding to promote outstanding progress.
- A few members of staff are not as skilled as others at using the information they have about pupils' progress to set work at the right level for them. Sometimes the pace of lessons is too slow and tasks not challenging enough.
- Although the school has settled into the new building very well, some classrooms are still not fully resourced or adapted for the age group of learners, particularly for Key Stage 1 and sixth form.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 24 lessons, including seven joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team made short visits to other lessons, looked at pupils' work and heard them read.
- The inspection team held meetings with groups of parents and pupils, governors, local authority advisers and the school's staff, including senior leaders and the specialist speech and language team.
- Inspectors took account of five responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as the school's own evidence as to parents' views. They also analysed 38 questionnaires completed by staff.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and looked at the school's policies, planning and procedures. These included the school's planning for improvement, the data it keeps on pupils' progress, as well as its safeguarding documentation.

Inspection team

Susan Lewis, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Rowena Green

Additional Inspector

Philip Winch

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a large special school which has over three times the number of boys as girls. It has recently moved into a new school on the same site as a mainstream secondary school, Highfields School.
- The school's population has changed considerably since its last inspection in December 2009. Students now have a broader and more complex range of special educational needs.
- The school's new sixth form opened in September 2012 with six students. The school does not admit children within the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs, usually for moderate or severe learning difficulties. The large majority have one or more additional needs such as medical needs, attention deficit disorders, behavioural, social and emotional needs, dyslexia and/or autistic spectrum disorder.
- A very high proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for pupil premium which is special government funding given to the school to support pupils eligible for free school meals, those who are in local authority care or from families in the armed forces.
- The proportion of pupils from other ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language is also high.
- The school provides and manages an outreach service to local schools.
- It also provides a range of clubs, including a youth club, breakfast and after-school clubs, residential visits and a summer holiday clubs for its pupils.
- Not all parts of the school building were finished at the time of the inspection. In particular only part of the outdoor space was finished limiting the range of onsite outdoor activities that could be undertaken by pupils during the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
 - ensuring that the tasks and activities that pupils are given in lessons are set the just the right level for them so that they challenge them and make them think
 - making sure that teachers do not dominate lessons by talking for too long or telling pupils things they could read or work out for themselves
 - ensuring all teachers and support staff understand the new approach to supporting pupils' skills in sounding out words and working out spellings and that they follow this in all subjects
 - adapting the rooms and outdoor learning areas and providing more resources for the youngest pupils and the sixth form students so that these enable teachers to provide more interesting learning opportunities appropriate to pupils' and students' level of development.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' starting points whenever they enter the school are usually well below those of others of their age because of the diversity of their needs and the significant needs that many have. For some this is compounded by poor attendance at previous schools.
- All groups, whatever their background and starting points, progress and achieve well by the end of Year 11 because of good teaching and improved provision. A few are successful in GCSEs in subjects such as mathematics, science, art and information and communication technology (ICT), occasionally at the higher levels. Excellent partnership working with other special schools and with Highfields ensures that all pupils have access to courses that fit them well for life after school. For example, individual pupils take GCSE English at Highfields or sports and construction courses elsewhere.
- Good developments, such as the writing of pupils' targets in more 'child friendly' ways, help parents and pupils to understand their targets more and so pupils are able to work more systematically towards these. Parents and carers are very pleased with the progress their children are making.
- Students in the sixth form are already achieving well particularly in their ability to work on their own, for example, in food technology. Their reading and numeracy skills are developing rapidly because they are learning to use these in relevant, practical situations.
- Well targeted support programmes are accelerating some pupils' progress and improving their attitudes to, and enjoyment of, learning, including those eligible for support through pupil premium funding, so that they achieve at least as well as other pupils. Pupils say they are proud of the progress they make and it spurs them on to do even better. They like the rewards and marking systems and the ways in which these helps them to know how well they are doing.
- Careful planning, good teaching and detailed checking mean that there is an appropriate emphasis on pupils' basic skills and that they make good, and sometimes better, progress in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Pupils read to inspectors with fluency and expression, and tried hard to work out unfamiliar words, sounding out letters or working out the meaning from the rest of the text.
- A good proportion exceed expected levels from their starting points; however a few do not and, although this is often related to illness and/or attendance, sometimes it is because not all teachers provide tasks that systematically challenge pupils throughout a lesson.
- Students make good use of new technologies such as computers, hand held devices and digital cameras to work out things for themselves. They demonstrate excellent concentration, for example, in using laptops to research environmental and animal welfare groups and make good attempts at working out the meaning of information gained as a result.
- Girls achieve as well as boys and there is no noticeable difference based on pupils' ethnic backgrounds. Those for whom English is an additional language also achieve well. This is because almost all teachers and teaching assistants are adept at using well targeted questions and rich language that support outstanding progress in speaking and listening and communicating for all pupils.

- Pupils who have disabilities or special educational needs and/or medical needs also achieve well because the school ensures that they have the resources they need and teachers and support staff have received good training about these needs.

The quality of teaching is good

- Almost all teachers plan activities that take good account of pupils' previous levels and learning though in a small number of lessons this is not the case. They give good feedback to pupils as to how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils 'glow' with pride as they achieve targets they understand and challenge themselves to do more.
- Most lessons proceed at a good pace although sometimes the tasks pupils are given slow the pace of their learning such as when pupils spend too much time colouring in or sticking prepared sentences in books. Occasionally, teachers are too quick to explain things or to 'tell' pupils something that they could have challenged pupils to explain or find out about for themselves.
- Teaching of literacy and numeracy is good and has been strengthened by recent training for example in teaching pupils about letters and the sounds they make (phonics) and by subject leaders' access to outstanding practice in other schools. Not all staff are confident yet within the new approaches to sounding out words and spellings and occasionally do not reinforce these with pupils.
- Teaching and learning opportunities for the youngest pupils is constrained by the current organisation of the classrooms and the lack of any real outdoor learning opportunities on a continuous basis. Consequently, there are few opportunities for children to explore activities on their own or to move freely between those that are inside and others that are outside.
- Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good. All staff are skilled at engaging students' interests and encouraging them to do even more. Some courses, such as those in horticulture and or that use the outdoor environment, are currently more restricted because of the unfinished work and recent move.
- Recent improvements in the subjects studied through partnership working with Highfields and others and the constant search for new and relevant courses ensure everyone has the opportunity to leave with external qualifications and is prepared for next steps.
- Teachers make good use of paired activities to develop pupils' teamwork skills as well as to enable them to solve problems and share their ideas. They use available technology very well to excite pupils' interests and encourage their practical applications of their literacy skills in meaningful ways.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work together very well to promote pupils learning and provide consistent messages. They have excellent relationships with pupils and high expectations for them. Pupils say 'everyone matters at this school. They listen to what you say and want you to do well.' Such careful attention to the individual and celebration of their small but significant gains in learning really inspires pupils to try harder and raises their self esteem.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The atmosphere in school is calm and welcoming; pupils say, 'Everyone is respected it doesn't matter whether you are big or small'. This means that pupils settle down to work from the moment they enter the school each day.
- Pupils often enter the school with histories of challenging behaviour and limited awareness of risks. Staff are expert at managing behaviour and at helping the pupils to understand the system. This means pupils learn to manage their behaviour exceptionally well. No poor behaviour was seen in lessons at all during the inspection and incident books reveal any serious incidents are extremely rare. Anger management classes, play therapy and counselling all support individual pupils to make significant improvements in how they behave.
- Pupils' attitudes and excellent behaviour make a very strong contribution to lessons and learning. Even in the few cases where the activities are not challenging enough, pupils remain well behaved and focused on their work. They respect their teachers and want to please them and to do well; they find the reward system highly motivating and so try their best.
- Pupils attend regularly and significant absences are almost always related to pupils' medical conditions.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of all forms of bullying and are insistent that it 'does not happen here'. However, they trust their teachers to sort out anything that might occur. Some say they were bullied 'because of my learning difficulties' before they came to this school but now feel more confident about meeting and dealing with other people and children.
- Pupils relish the opportunities that they have to join in lessons and activities with Highfields and say they wish to do even more of this at lessons, clubs and playtimes. They are realistic about needing some staff support to help others to understand their needs but are clear that this will all help them to achieve even more.
- Parents and carers praise the ways that the school keeps their children safe and helps them to understand and manage their own safety. They say that the school 'goes the extra mile' in reassuring them and trying to help them to manage their children's behaviour at home.
- Pupils develop a strong moral and social conscience and respect for other's differences, cultures and beliefs and this all supports their behaviour and the school's harmonious community

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders have successfully managed the complex negotiations relating to the building of the new school, and the move into it, whilst maintaining the good standards of work and good teaching identified at the last inspection. They have continued to provide excellent levels of care that really promote the well being of all pupils including the much higher percentage of pupils with additional needs, skilling up staff well to do this.
- In addition they have developed other aspects of the school's work such as the role of middle managers, the introduction of the sixth form and extended the range of learning opportunities further. This is testament to their commitment and determination that every pupil should achieve the most possible and to the good capacity the school has to improve further.
- Parents and carers praise the school, their children's achievements and the ways in which it keeps their children safe. They have many opportunities to be involved in their child's learning

and join in groups such as the Share group with enthusiasm. In this they make materials for school, but also have the opportunities to learn new skills themselves and to understand more about what their child is learning and how. Excellent relationships with families are further supported by the welfare systems in place.

- The school works in very close partnership with parents, health professionals and other support services such as visiting teachers to ensure that pupils' learning, medical and therapy needs are met. The school buys in additional therapies and has trained its staff so that pupils' speech and language and their emotional needs are very well supported and they make outstanding progress in these areas.
- A robust system for the management of performance has improved teaching so that the proportion of good and outstanding teaching is improving. There is no inadequate teaching and new staff are very well supported, for example, by phase and subject leaders and by the wealth of data and records that the school keeps and analyses effectively. This means that staff can quickly identify pupils levels and needs.
- The Outreach provision is very well led and offers a very high quality service to local schools. Evidence shows it is highly valued and staff skills are carefully targeted towards activities that make a real difference in client schools' confidence and capacity to support the achievement and well being of the pupils they have concerns about.
- The sixth form provision is well led by the temporary leader. They and the senior leadership team are very clear as to the objectives of this provision and the possible destinations of these students after school are under constant review so that the courses they take will be linked into this. There is a very clear and appropriate focus on life skills and learning to live independently.
- The local authority regards the school as a 'light touch' school in terms of educational standards but has provided good 'sign posting' to the school in terms of effective working with educational professionals and other schools to improve teaching further. The local authority is providing good support to the school in relation to the building of the new school.

■ **The governance of the school:**

The governing body of the school is knowledgeable and informed about the school's work, knows its strengths and areas for development well and is highly committed to improving it further. Governors have had good training to help them to play their roles as critical friends effectively and question the leadership team carefully on the school's performance. They are clear about the impact of the school's management of performance on achievement, teaching and the effectiveness of middle management. The governing body checks up well on how the pupil premium is being used and the school's evidence on its effectiveness in making a difference to the achievement of the pupils for whom it is intended.

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	104412
Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	403774

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	159
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	6
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ken Morris
Headteacher	Elaine Stanley
Date of previous school inspection	10 December 2009
Telephone number	01902 558640
Fax number	01902 558641
Email address	office@pennfields.com

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