



Penn Fields School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104412
Local Authority Wolverhampton
Inspection number 286933
Inspection dates 27–28 February 2007
Reporting inspector Patricia Potheary

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Birches Barn Road
School category	Community special		Penn Fields
Age range of pupils	5–16		Wolverhampton WV3 7BJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01902 339786
Number on roll (school)	160	Fax number	01902 831911
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mike Wolverson
		Headteacher	Brian Briggshaw
Date of previous school inspection	13 January 2003		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
5–16	27–28 February 2007	286933

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Penn Fields is a large special school for pupils with a range of learning difficulties and disabilities. A large majority of pupils have moderate learning difficulties, and a small but increasing minority have severe learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and the rest are from other ethnic origins, mainly Asian. Pupils come from a wide mix of social backgrounds with relatively high levels of deprivation. The school runs a community outreach service.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Penn Fields is a very caring and effective school, which offers a good quality of education to its pupils. Pupils' personal development and well-being, in particular, are outstanding because excellent care, guidance and support help them to become as responsible and independent as possible.

Due to the nature of their learning difficulties, standards in the school are well below national averages. Nevertheless, good purposeful teaching and learning and an outstanding curriculum mean that pupils make good progress and achieve well. Good leadership and management ensure that everyone leaves with a high number of worthwhile qualifications as well as other skills, which will stand them in very good stead for their future careers. Although generally good, the assessment of pupils' learning day to day is not consistently thorough. For this reason, a few lessons are not planned to meet pupils' different needs effectively, and learning for some is slowed as a result.

Pupils enjoy school enormously, especially their lessons, and parents testify to the good progress and greatly increased confidence of their children. One parent typically reported, 'It is a friendly happy school' and several say how much their children want to be at school. Pupils' behaviour is exceptionally good, largely as a result of their positive, warm and supportive relationships with staff. It is quite common to see pupils spontaneously helping each other and, through many activities such as attending the very effective school council, they make an excellent contribution to their school and wider community. The rich, high quality curriculum helps pupils learn about a host of interesting things, including some excellent work on keeping safe and healthy.

There has been substantial improvement since the last inspection. Senior staff constantly seek to improve the school and do the very best for pupils. Pupils are making better progress, gaining more qualifications and receiving better teaching than they were four years ago. Self-evaluation is good. Senior leaders have a very detailed picture of how well each pupil is doing and they monitor the progress of the different groups exceptionally well. However this information is not summarised clearly, which has led to a lack of clarity in communicating where pupils' overall progress is good and where it could be better. As a result the work of further improving pupils' achievements is slowed. All but two governors are new and, although they carry out their duties satisfactorily, they do not take a sufficiently rigorous role in overseeing the quality of the school's work and how well pupils are doing. Extensive links with other organisations are excellent and greatly enhance the quality of the school's overall provision. For example the community outreach service, run by the school, brings substantial benefits to the pupils in terms of developing teacher skills and links with other schools.

What the school should do to improve further

- Summarise clearly the detailed information collected on pupils' progress, to better highlight the most important areas for improvement.

- Improve the consistency of assessment day to day so that teachers can plan to meet pupils' different needs more effectively in all lessons.
- Improve the role of governors so that they oversee the work of the school and how well pupils are doing more rigorously.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Due to pupils learning difficulties and disabilities, standards compared to all schools nationally are well below average. Pupils make good progress and achieve well in all age groups so that, by the time they leave school, they all gain a high number of qualifications, which may include entry levels, GCSEs or the ASDAN transition challenge. Good progress is achieved by pupils in almost every subject due to the excellent systems for making sure that all subjects are taught to a similarly good standard. There are several examples of outstanding progress where pupils have, for example, achieved several GCSEs or other awards despite beginning from a low starting point. Parents are very pleased with how well their children are doing. One wrote how her son 'surprises us with the things he knows'. Progress for the growing minority with severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders is consistently good and often outstanding and this is a significant improvement since the last inspection.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is evident all around the school. One interesting lesson, with pupils acting as a Chinese dragon, demonstrated just how well pupils begin to understand different lives and cultures. Pupils everywhere show respect and care for others to a remarkable extent and this is strongly appreciated by parents. Pupils' behaviour is excellent and, despite a lively enjoyment of their work and play, they understand and respect what is required of them very maturely. They report little bullying and feel and behave very safely. Through a comprehensive package of initiatives pupils have clear understanding of how to eat healthily, take plenty of exercise and avoid obvious dangers. Pupils' positive attitudes to doing their best are reflected in their attendance, which is rigorously monitored and for most pupils outstanding. Pupils contribute exceptionally well to the school and wider community and help raise substantial amounts for different charities. Some are learning sign language to communicate with a hearing impaired classmate. Pupils leaving the school are exceptionally well prepared for adult life, with plenty of experience of the world of work, good progress in basic skills and excellent social and team working skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

In lessons, relationships and pupils' behaviour are of a very high quality, contributing substantially to the hard working and caring atmosphere, which pervades the school. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the lively, interesting activities and skilled support, which helps them do so well and leads to the overall good quality of learning. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent so that pupils make consistently good progress in the widest range of subjects. Pupils showed great enthusiasm for many different subjects including science, art and information and communication technology (ICT) saying that lessons were 'the best part of school'. In English for pupils aged 11 to 14 and in ICT, teaching is usually outstanding. Teachers know the pupils and their targets very well, hence the good progress. The overall quality of assessment is good, but in a few lessons assessment of what each pupil has learned lacks rigour. This in turn means that the quality of lesson planning to build on that learning and meet different needs is inconsistent. This has resulted in a few lessons where progress for some pupils is slower.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum is monitored regularly to ensure that it is very well adapted to the needs of each pupil. It is also exceptionally rich, with many additional activities, clubs, arts events, visits and visitors to bring learning alive. Numerous awards and initiatives including those for sports, ICT and inclusion have strengthened this. In fact the timetable is packed with interesting things to do, including morning exercise and independent travel programmes for those who need it. The school's extensive links with other schools and providers mean that many pupils have opportunities to work or socialise alongside their mainstream peers, several belonging to the local cadets for example. Pupils also have ample opportunities to learn about the world of work. This is why they are so keen to come to school and why they develop such a wide range of personal and other skills to prepare them for a successful future. The school provides a good range of accredited courses for pupils aged 14-16 so that those of different abilities can find a course to suit their needs. This means that several pupils leave school with as many qualifications as some of their mainstream peers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The procedures for child protection and the monitoring of health and safety are thorough and robust. There is excellent support for pupils in helping and guiding them with their personal skills, with strong links to a host of support agencies and therapists. Besides the positive atmosphere of caring for each other there is exemplary support for parents and families from the school welfare officer. The school is exceptionally

thorough in regularly keeping track of pupils' progress so that appropriate support may be given quickly to pupils as necessary. Every pupil has challenging targets in every subject, which are reviewed regularly and they have a clear understanding of these. Pupils contribute to setting their own targets and to help review their success in meeting them. There is very good communication with parents who feel confident that they receive detailed information on their child's progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Senior leaders have a strong and unwavering commitment to making Penn Fields a high quality school. They have successfully improved pupils' achievements since the last inspection, especially for the least able. This quality has been achieved across the whole subject range. Several new staff have joined, and staff morale and the teamwork necessary to promote the well-being of pupils is excellent. This has led to pupils' outstanding personal development and consistently good progress. There is therefore a good capacity to continue improving. Good self-evaluation is thorough and seeks stakeholder views well. Pupils' progress is calculated in very great detail and analysed by age group, subject, learning difficulty and ethnicity to seek ways to raise standards even further. However this wealth of good information is not yet clearly summarised to present a focused view of where progress is good and where it needs to be improved. This does not prevent, but occasionally slows the school's efforts to take pupils' achievement to the next level. Almost all governors are new and undertaking training. They are currently satisfactory in fulfilling their duties. Their role in asking challenging questions and holding the school to account for pupils' progress is not yet well developed.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	-----------------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for being so welcoming to us when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you very much, joining you for lunch and seeing some of your lessons.

We found your school to be successful, well run and very caring. It is a good school, just like several of you told us it was. It helps all of you to make good progress in your subjects, to gain many qualifications and to make excellent progress in your personal development. School leaders do a good job in seeing that the school keeps improving. You are responsible, hard working and behave extremely well. Your teachers and teaching assistants are very skilled at helping you to do your best and teaching is good. We would like them to take even more care assessing your work and making sure that every lesson is well suited to all of you. The way you care for and help each other is outstanding and you clearly enjoy coming to school.

We were pleased to see that you take plenty of exercise and try to eat a healthy diet. You work and socialise very well together and we think that this, alongside your good skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT, will stand you in very good stead for working life. Your teachers see to it that you have an excellent range of subjects, activities and links to other organisations to help you learn well and prepare for the next stage. The school is very good at keeping you safe and at helping you to become mature well-rounded people. It also cares for and guides you exceptionally well to do your best so that you are better prepared for your future lives. We have asked school leaders to make the information on your progress and how it can be improved much clearer to everyone. We have also asked governors to check your progress more closely to see that the school continues to do a good job.

We are impressed with the contribution you make to the smooth running of the school and wish you all the very best in the future.