

Penkridge Middle School

Marsh Lane, Penkridge, Stafford, ST19 5BW

Inspection dates 11–12 June 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Attainment is rising and leaders' rigorous assessment shows that students now make consistently better than expected progress from their various starting points. They enjoy their learning and particularly the frequent opportunities to work closely with their friends.
- By the time they leave the school at the end of Year 8, disabled students and those with special educational needs make outstanding progress as a result of the excellent expert support they receive.
- The quality of teaching is now good and often outstanding. There is a high proportion of consistent good practice across year groups and subjects. Leaders have ensured that the marking of students' work is outstanding, providing opportunities for students to respond to the advice they are given on how to improve.
- Students are keen to learn and their behaviour in lessons and around school is exemplary. They are polite and respectful to adults and take great care of each other. They value the way in which adults support them and say that the school keeps them very safe. The care, guidance and support they receive are outstanding.
- The inspirational headteacher is supported by a very strong team, including very effective middle leaders, many of whom are newly appointed. All staff and governors share her vision for enabling all students to achieve their potential. Rigorous processes are in place to ensure that the quality of teaching continues to rise.
- The range of subjects students study, together with the well-planned additional experiences provided, promote their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare them as global citizens.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Although the gap is closing, between the achievement of those students for whom the pupil premium provides additional support and their classmates, there has been insufficient impact to date, particularly in literacy.
- In a small minority of lessons, particularly when classes are taught as mixed ability groups, teachers miss the opportunity to fully challenge those of highest ability.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 31 lessons, three of which were jointly observed with one of the school’s senior leaders. They also made a number of further short visits to lessons.
- Meetings were held with students, members of the governing body, parents and carers, and staff, including subject leaders. In addition, a phone call took place with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at policies, self-evaluation and development planning, monitoring records, minutes of meetings of the governing body, information about students’ progress, safeguarding documents, and samples of students’ work.
- The views of the 59 parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account, in addition to two written communications from parents and carers. Inspectors also took account of 36 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mary Davis, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Janet Bird	Additional Inspector
Robert Bourdon-Pierre	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized middle school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action, is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The vast majority of students are from White British backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, (which provides additional funding for students in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and students who have a parent in the armed forces), is below average.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- Alternative courses are provided in school for a small number of students for whom circumstances may make them vulnerable. None are taught off-site.
- The school is part of the Wolgarston collaboration between 11 local first and middle schools, together with Wolgarston High School.
- The school has Enhanced Dyslexia Friendly Full status and has been awarded as an Anti-bullying Pledge Plus school. The school is a specialist college for science and mathematics.
- The school receives additional funding from 'Aim High' to support disabled students and those with special educational needs.
- In the past two years the school has experienced considerable staffing turbulence. New subject leaders, including in English, mathematics and science, have been in post since the start of this academic year. The headteacher was appointed in September 2010.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise levels of achievement further by:
 - increasing the proportion of students reaching the highest levels
 - ensuring that the gap closes further, between the achievement of those students eligible for additional pupils premium funding and that of their peers
- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring that:
 - teachers consistently provide tasks that challenge those of highest ability and promote their independence, particularly when they are taught in mixed ability classes.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The school's accurate and detailed assessment shows that pupils enter the school in Year 5 broadly in line with the expected levels for their age in the basic skills of reading, writing, communication and mathematics. Standards at the end of Year 6 rose in 2012 to be in line with national expectations and during the current academic year have risen further. Rigorous assessment and tracking of progress, together with inspectors' observations during the inspection, show that pupils are now making better than the expected rates of progress throughout Key Stage 2. This is as a result of the consistently good teaching they now receive.
- Students continue to make good and sometimes outstanding progress through Key Stage 3. In 2012, levels of attainment by the end of Year 8 were above national expectations. They have continued to rise during 2013, with the large majority of the current Year 8 cohort having already met the challenging targets set for them by the end of Year 9. An increasing proportion of students are reaching the highest levels, although leaders recognise that this can be further improved in both key stages.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make outstanding progress. This is as a result of the timely, high quality interventions from an exceptional special needs coordinator and her highly committed team, who are well trained to address the needs of students with a variety of complex needs and low starting points. The 'Phoenix' base provides a nurturing and stimulating environment. Students speak warmly of the support they receive here that has helped them to meet their personal challenges.
- There is no significant difference in progress between ethnic groups, and the very few students who speak English as an additional language achieve well as a result of the strong support they receive.
- Well-established strategies help to speed up progress in reading. Year 7 catch-up premium is used to supplement support for the weakest readers, establishing a systematic approach and laying the foundation for effective individual support throughout the school. The current average reading level of Year 8 students, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, is in line with that expected for their age with many achieving beyond this. This demonstrates a positive impact from the use of this funding.
- Students are frequently encouraged to read out loud and there is a strong focus in all subjects on developing an understanding of technical subject vocabulary. For example in an outstanding music lesson, students were encouraged to reflect on the meaning of 'structure', 'contrast' and 'unity', before experiencing the musical application of these terms. They showed great enjoyment as they were encouraged to show, by different dance moves, that they recognised repeated and contrasting themes while listening to an arrangement of Beethoven's 5th symphony.
- In 2012, by the end of Year 6 after five terms at the school, the attainment of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals was a year behind their classmates in English and mathematics. Current assessments show this gap to be closing as students move up the school, particularly in mathematics. This group, now reaching the end of Year 7, are now less than two terms behind. This group of students is well supported both to promote their achievement and in the provision of care and support. The school recognises, however, that this remains an area for development and has already appointed a coordinator using the additional pupil premium funding to oversee this support and to drive improvement in both literacy and numeracy.

- Students following alternative courses achieve well. Their progress and well-being is closely monitored to make sure that their long-term needs are being effectively met.

The quality of teaching is good

- The vast proportion of teaching observed during the inspection was good or outstanding. There is a high degree of consistency in the way that teachers plan and teach lessons. Lessons are active and fun, engaging students' interest. Inspectors frequently observed a buzz of activity and excitement, as students were engrossed in their work, and made rapid progress.
- Students collaborate and discuss their work in pairs or groups as a matter of course so that they are able to explore and develop their ideas through discussion and reflect on the best answer. They are skilled and evidently experienced in this teamwork, taking turns to write or respond and supporting each other. These experiences promote their social development exceptionally well.
- Teachers use assessment information very well to plan their lessons. For example in an outstanding mathematics lesson, the teacher planned an active task to address a common lack of understanding he had identified. Here he provided students with first-hand practical experience, as they worked out probability using different coloured sweets. Students made rapid progress as they enthusiastically practised their skills, frequently being challenged to try something more difficult.
- The marking of students' work across all subjects is outstanding. Not only do students have a clear understanding of their targets and how to reach them, but also are frequently provided with the opportunity to respond to the advice given by undertaking a new challenge or practising a skill. Disabled students and those with special educational needs often receive clear and encouraging verbal feedback on their work to ensure that they understand what to do next.
- Teachers frequently provide students with assessment criteria for the task they are undertaking, to promote their independence in striving to improve. For example in a Year 6 science lesson, students who were targeted to achieve level 5 were observed discussing together how many elements of level 6 they thought they could achieve as they examined the criteria for each level.
- Leaders have established common practice to ensure that teachers identify a focus group of slower learners in each class and provide them with focused support and well planned resources to promote their achievement. A small minority of teachers, however, miss opportunities to sufficiently challenge those of highest ability, particularly in Key Stage 2, where most lessons are taught in mixed ability groups.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The outstanding behaviour of students in lessons is shown by their exemplary attitudes to learning, and is a strong feature of the school. Relationships with each other and with adults are excellent, showing mutual respect. Their behaviour around the school is calm and well ordered.
- Students show tolerance and understanding of those in need of extra support for their behaviour. The school's outstanding support for these students, many of whom face challenging circumstances, includes well coordinated multi-agency support. Case study evidence shows the positive impact of this support, enabling students to be included and to achieve. Strategies to manage behaviour are well understood and consistently applied. Those with considerable additional needs are very well managed, enabling these students to make good progress and to

become increasingly self-confident.

- Students say that the school keeps them safe and that there is always an adult who will support them if they are troubled. They particularly value the work of the pupil support officer. The school's strong focus on anti-bullying has resulted in students being able to show a very good understanding of the different forms that bullying can take and of how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. They told inspectors that bullying is rare and that racism is not tolerated.
- Parents and staff agree that behaviour is very well managed and that children are kept very safe.
- Attendance rates are steadily rising and are above average, and students are punctual to their lessons. The school works very well to support students and their families facing challenging circumstances, to promote their good attendance.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher is passionate about her vision for taking the school forward and striving for excellence. Since her appointment, she has taken firm action to secure stability after a period of staffing turbulence and to embed good practice across the school. This is now having an impact on raising students' achievement. Her vision is shared by the governing body and an extremely strong senior team. The equally strong middle leaders, including those newly appointed, have already had a significant impact on raising achievement and the quality of teaching in their subjects. During the inspection it was clear how passionate all staff are to give of their best for the benefit of their students.
- Rigorous procedures are in place to check on the quality of teaching and a high degree of common practice has been well established across the school. Middle leaders share in this programme of checking and have been instrumental in establishing sessions at the start of the day where good practice can be regularly shared. They hold all teachers closely to account for the progress made by their students.
- Leaders are quick to identify training needs, and the collaboration with other local schools has enabled the sharing of training costs and of good practice, to establish common methods across the age groups. For example, the head of mathematics has introduced a common calculation policy that will enable students of all ages to use the same methods, ensuring a smooth transition in learning from one school to another.
- Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and have identified appropriate priorities for further development. The meticulous tracking of progress, including the analysis of the performance of different groups of students, leads to well focused actions. This has included identifying that the gap between those eligible for the pupil premium funding and their peers, needs to close at a faster rate.
- Currently the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding is well used to provide support that includes extra support in English and mathematics, including mentoring, and to insure that these students can be fully included in all activities such as instrumental tuition and study visits.
- The local authority provides light-touch support, including external support for literacy. Expert key-note speakers have provided inspirational training that has enabled teachers across subjects to improve their practice.

- The range of subjects and special days provide a holistic learning experience for students, not just in promoting academic achievement but providing them with vital life skills. Specialist facilities include a gardening area where students can grow and sell their own produce. Opportunities to be creative through, for example, design and technology, art and music are a strong feature of the schools' work. Links with a Chinese school and opportunities through religious education, assemblies and special days, promote students' understanding and respect for other cultures and religions. Teamwork is further promoted through a wide range of sporting activities. Pupil premium and other external funding also provide an alternative course within school for students facing challenging circumstances, where they are nurtured and gain success.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding as a result of the provision of a myriad of opportunities to learn about and understand the world, ensuring their development as global citizens. Frequent opportunities are provided for them to reflect on issues that affect them and to form their own opinions. As a result, by Year 8, students show exceptional maturity and understanding of moral issues.
- The school works hard to engage parents in the life of the school, particularly through a weekly newsletter. Information evenings are provided to enable parents to support their child's learning. Parents listen to children read on a regular basis and help in the school library. Pupil premium and additional funding from 'Aim High' has been used to enable some pupils to go horse riding, accompanied by their parents for the final session, to promote their confidence and wellbeing.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is very well informed and qualified. Governors have a close working relationship with the senior leadership team, providing appropriate challenge and support. They seek to improve their practice through undertaking regular training. They understand the complex issues of comparing the school's performance with schools nationally. Governors are well deployed according to their expertise so that every aspect of the school's work is scrutinised. They share the headteacher's vision that students develop as young people and meet with other leaders of collaboration schools to ensure a smooth transition from phase to phase and the establishment of common practice. They are fully aware of the spending of pupil premium funding and check its impact on raising the achievement of the students it supports. They have ensured effective management of financial resources and that safeguarding procedures and practice are exemplary. They know about how the school manages teachers' performance and fully support the headteacher in tackling any underperformance.

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	124423
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	412111

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	406
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Davenport
Headteacher	Sue King
Date of previous school inspection	20 January 2010
Telephone number	01785 355545
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