

# Penair School

Pupil Premium review

October 2016

**Reviewer: Ken Bush**

## School context

- Penair School is an averaged-sized 11-16 academy situated in Truro, Cornwall. In recent years, the school roll has reduced from approximately 1200 students in 2013 to around 875 currently. It is likely that the school's PAN will be reduced in the near future due to the changing demographic in the city and the reduced demand for places.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium (referred to in the review as 'disadvantaged students') is below the national average. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average, although the proportion of those with a statement or EHC plan is above average. The great majority of students are of White British heritage.
- Students typically join the school with average to just above average prior attainment.
- The current head teacher, James Davidson, was appointed in September 2015. Significant changes in staffing and leadership across a range of subjects have been made in the recent past, principally as a response to falling rolls and the consequent impact upon the school's budget.
- Penair was last inspected by Ofsted in June 2015 under the leadership of the previous headteacher. Its overall effectiveness and all sub-judgements were judged to Require Improvement. The school was requested to seek improvements as follows:
  - Ensure that the leadership, including governors, focuses more strongly on rigorously holding all teachers to account so that standards, including those in science, improve with more urgency.
  - Increase consistency in teaching to generate more rapid progress, *in particular, for those supported by the pupil premium funding* by:
    - providing effective feedback of students' work
    - making sure students can regularly make amendments and improvements to their work following feedback from teachers and other adults
    - ensuring that the activities planned for the students are effective and help all groups of students to make progress from their starting points.
  - Ensure that the strategies for improving attendance and persistent absence for all students and, *in particular, those who receive pupil premium funding*, are effective and lead to attendance that is above national average and persistent absence that is below.

*In addition, the school was tasked with undertaking an external review of its use of the pupil premium in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved. This is the main focus for the present review.*

- The school also received an HMI monitoring visit in June 2016, approximately one year after the previous s5 inspection. The report acknowledged the progress the school had made in addressing the issues from the previous inspection, but stressed the need for further work on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and to undertake the pupil premium review referred to above.

## **Review context**

The following evidence was considered as part of the review- in each case, with a specific focus on disadvantaged students:

- Several learning walks to observe teaching and learning first-hand, conducted jointly by the reviewer and senior staff
- Scrutiny of students' current work as seen in books, folders etc
- Analysis of the school's achievement data, including the progress being made by current groups of students in KS3 and KS4
- Analysis of the school's track record re- attendance and behaviour
- Observation of, and discussions with students in both formal and informal contexts
- Meetings with subject leaders and other senior leaders and with the Chair and Vice Chair of the governing body
- Documentation provided by the school, including the school improvement plan and summary of self-evaluation
- Documentation available on the school's website.

Other selected aspects of whole-school effectiveness are considered in the Annex.

## Review outcomes

### School website- information for parents and other interested parties

- The school provides comprehensive information on the school website on key all aspects of PP funding.
- The updated policy statement (June 2016) makes it clear that strategies to secure improvement for students in this group rightly sits within the context of whole-school achievement and that providing 'quality first teaching' for all is the overriding priority. There is also a clear acknowledgement of the use of such established good practice principles as marking the work of disadvantaged students first, where possible. Lines of accountability, including the role of the governing body (GB), in monitoring the impact of strategies and related funding are also usefully highlighted.
- The website provides detailed breakdowns of allocated spending against specific headings for both 2014-15 and 2015-6, together with detailed commentary on the impact upon outcomes. In 2014-15, this is augmented with a concise summary prepared for discussion with HMI in Autumn 2015. The 2015-16 'costings for governors' tab would benefit from a more analytical response in the 'Successful intervention' column as 'Yes/No' does not readily enable careful monitoring to inform 'value for money' discussions and future actions, notwithstanding the 'Next steps' column.
- Commentary on positive 2016 achievement outcomes is linked well to the planned spend for 2016-17. The key spending priorities are explained in depth and there is a clear and very well-written 'headline' narrative about the impact in 2016-17 on the outgoing Year 11 cohort. It is recommended that this is updated/amended as the year goes on to include other key outcomes that celebrate the success of the school's strategy.
- Despite the wealth of useful information provided, the website is not fully compliant with the revised statutory requirements that came into effect on September 1 2016. In particular, a more overt approach to identifying 'main barriers to educational achievement' is recommended, along with how it is intended that planned strategies will address those barriers. Schools are also asked to be explicit about how the impact and effect of expenditure will be measured.

### Strategy into practice

- In addition to the focus on good teaching for all students, the school makes effective use of a wide range of intervention and other strategies to improve outcomes for those supported by PP. These are widely recognised as examples of good practice and endorsed by organisations such as The Sutton Trust. These include: providing resources, such as laptops and revision booklets; 1-1 support in English and in mathematics, and access to mentoring and social support, such as nurture groups;
- The reviewer observed first-hand the very successful Breakfast Club at which students supported by PP (as well as others) receive a free, healthy breakfast. This is very well attended. Students spoken to give a strong endorsement of how it enables them to get their working day off to a good start. Similarly, the daily Homework Club is regularly

used by an increasing proportion of disadvantaged students. Attendance is carefully logged and analysed to assess the impact upon students' progress.

- Teachers are asked to complete a GRAP-LE (Group Raising Achievement Plan- for Learning) sheet for any students in their class who are under-performing, noting the precise strategies that they intend to use over a six-week period to address individual weaknesses. Though not exclusively for disadvantaged students, this is a key approach which should benefit this group at least as much as any other. Although this is a sound improvement strategy, this is not yet working consistently in practice because not all staff are either clear about its intended purpose or fail to see its value. Leaders agree that more work needs to be done to ensure that staff are more rigorous in their completion of these monitoring sheets to ensure well-tailored support occurs.
- In the small sample of students' work seen by the reviewer, there were no significant differences in the quality of students' work and rates of progress comparing disadvantaged students with others with similar starting points. The quality and regularity of marking was also very similar, illustrating that teachers' expectations are no less high for those students supported by PP than for others.
- Some disadvantaged students struggle to maintain consistently tidy and well-presented exercise books and have poor handwriting. This group, and indeed other pupils, would benefit from additional support in improving the quality of presentation to promote greater pride in their work and to raise standards.
- The school has made sound early steps in gauging the views of disadvantaged students and their parents/carers regarding barriers to learning and what strategies are most effective in helping students to improve. However, leaders acknowledge more could be done in this area in the future.

## **Outcomes**

- There is a growing body of evidence to indicate that gaps in achievement between disadvantaged students and others are narrowing over time; this represents significant improvement since the previous Ofsted inspection in 2015.
- In the 2016 (unvalidated) KS4 results, there were a number of striking improvements compared with previous years. The proportion of students gaining 5 x A\*-C grades, including English and mathematics, increased by 8%, a greater improvement than for non- disadvantaged students, leading to a smaller gap than in 2015. There were similar improvements and narrower gaps in the new Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores also.
- Most encouraging of all was the significant improvement in outcomes for the most able disadvantaged students, reflected in a much higher proportion of A\*-A grades; at 38%, this was over double the proportion attained in 2015.
- There was also a marked increase in the proportion of disadvantaged students achieving both the expected three levels and the better than expected four levels of progress in English. Again, this also reflected narrowing gaps in the context of improved outcomes for all students, not just those supported through PP.
- For those students currently at Penair, the picture is similarly positive, despite minor variations in the size of gaps across the school. However, there are no endemic

weaknesses in particular subjects or year groups, so that overall there is clear evidence that the progress of disadvantaged students is now approaching that of students with the same prior attainment/starting points.

- As for other students, those supported by PP report that they feel that they are very well supported by staff at key transition points such as KS3 into KS4 and regarding post-16 options, including careers education.

### **Attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning**

- The school has responded exceptionally well to the need highlighted in the 2015 Ofsted inspection to improve the attendance of disadvantaged students. At the time of the inspection, attendance for this group was 88.6%, well below the national averages for this group compared both with similar students and with all students. By the end of the academic year 2015-16, this had risen by 4.5% to 93.1%.
- The improvements for those students who are persistently absent are equally impressive. The proportion of persistent absentees has reduced from 23.8% in May 2015 to less than 10% one year later using the same measure. This is now close to the national average for this group.
- The improvement trends have continued into the current academic year both for absence and persistent absence measures, indicating the effectiveness of the range of strategies put into place. These include a much greater propensity to challenge poor attendance, a coordinated data-driven approach by a dedicated team of leaders and other support staff and excellent liaison with educational welfare professionals. Like other students, those supported by PP have also responded very well to the increased profile of rewards for 100% attendance. At the time of the review, there were almost as many recipients of awards from this group as for other students.
- Disadvantaged students, in the main, behave well at Penair and have positive attitudes to learning. They are mostly keen to do well and take pride in their school. Although a few spoken to by the reviewer were a little lacking in self-confidence compared with other students, some showed a willingness to try new approaches in their work. In a Year 7 English group observed by the reviewer, disadvantaged students enthusiastically wrote their own poems inspired by Wilfred Owens' *Dulce et Decorum Est*. In tackling this, they rose to a considerable challenge and shared the fruits of their work with enthusiasm!
- As with all students at Penair, there has been a reduction in the number of disadvantaged students receiving sanctions such as fixed-term exclusions, referrals to the school's isolation room and after-school detentions. Nevertheless, this group is still disproportionately over-represented which leaders agree, is an area for further investigation and improvement.

## Leadership and management, including the governing body

- Maximising the opportunities for disadvantaged students and supporting them to achieve as well as other students is given a very high profile at Penair School. However, the school has quite correctly not made the assumption that disadvantaged students form a homogenous group. Consequently, leaders continually seek to treat all as individuals as far as possible, each of whom requires a bespoke approach.
- Support for disadvantaged students is well-led by two members of the Senior Leadership Team who ensure that all staff are aware of their responsibilities and that funding is well-used. Consequently, the use of PP is leading to demonstrably better outcomes for disadvantaged students.
- A key strategy to ensure that all teachers are acutely aware of the achievement of disadvantaged students is the insistence that this forms one of their performance management targets. Leaders, thus, are able to maintain a high level of accountability and commitment from all teaching staff.
- Penair has developed a highly effective electronic tracking system to record students' provision, the costs entailed in this and the impact upon learning and achievement. This enables leaders and other staff both to become increasingly 'smart' about the impact of new data regarding students' performance and to inform modification of provision, when needed.
- Leaders and other staff who wish to be allocated funds to support specific PP projects in their areas of responsibility are required to bid for funding. This empowers staff to be accountable for outcomes and to find solutions to overcome barriers. The approach essentially poses the question: 'What can you do to improve outcomes for your PP students?' rather than leaving the task solely to those leaders who have a coordinating function.
- Evaluation is generally fit-for-purpose but, in some instances, requires more coordination to ensure that 'lessons learned' about the extent of effectiveness of particular strategies can be drawn together more clearly. The modifications needed to bring about compliance on the school website will assist this process.
- The school's exceptionally well-designed curriculum enables all students, including those who are disadvantaged, to achieve well. Alongside other pathways, particular initiatives such as Top Gear, while not specifically for disadvantaged students, undoubtedly benefits high ability but lower achieving boys from this group. The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) helps students with poor attendance to achieve a worthwhile additional qualification and to boost their self-confidence.
- The governing body is knowledgeable about pupil premium funding, including the rationale for its allocation and the impact it has on improving students' achievement and other outcomes. They have appointed specialist governors to monitor the school's work to ensure that it is fully accountable. They, along with leaders, are also aware of the increasing importance of monitoring how well disadvantaged students achieve when compared with other students *nationally* as distinct from in-school gaps.

**Recommendations to increase disadvantaged students' achievement and continue to narrow gaps with other students**

1. Amend the documentation on the school's website to ensure compliance with the September 2016 DfE directive
2. Ensure strategies to support class teachers in tackling under-performance are consistently applied by all staff (specifically vis 'GRAPLE sheets')
3. Increase the focus on good presentation to raise standards and increase pride in students' work
4. Develop 'student voice' and parents voice' further to deepen understanding of how to support disadvantaged students more effectively
5. Reduce the proportion of disadvantaged students receiving formal behaviour sanctions when compared with other students
6. Refine approach to evaluation to acquire sharper appreciation of 'lessons learned' over time.

## **Annex**

### **Selected whole-school aspects where sufficient evidence was gathered during the review**

#### **Overview**

- Leaders and other staff have responded extremely well to the areas for improvement identified in the 2015 Ofsted report. Despite the marked improvements in achievement and in attendance referred to below, there is absolutely no complacency with the key actions from the inspection writ large in school improvement planning documentation and a standing item at meetings of the governing body.
- The new headteacher has made a very strong start in his first year, both in building upon existing strengths and in ensuring rapid improvement has taken place where it was most necessary. He has also forged very quickly a strong senior team where effective, distributed leadership is very much in evidence.
- As a result of these improvements- achieved against the backdrop of a shrinking budget- Penair School is very well-placed to show consistent and sustained progress over time when it receives its next inspection.

#### **Achievement**

- Results at KS4 have continued to improve over time. In 2016 (unvalidated), the proportion of students gaining five GCSE A\*-C grades, including English and mathematics increased for the third successive year and continues to compare favourably with national averages. There were also improved scores in both the Progress 8 and Attainment 8 measures, both of which remain above average. In 2016, the gap between the attainment of boys compared with girls narrowed considerably compared with 2015.
- Attainment in a wide range of different subjects is high with many gaining 80%+ A\*-C pass rates. This represents sustained year-on-year improvement in many cases.
- The school is aware that achievement in science remains an area of relative weakness and has rightly identified this as a key area for improvement. Year 11 outcomes in 2016 were better than in the previous two years. The current Year 11 cohort are benefiting from more consistently effective teaching from a more settled staff team. Standards in KS3 are also rising in this subject as a result of a thorough overhaul of the curriculum.
- The progress made by the great majority of students by the time they leave school compares well with national figures. Expected progress and better-than-expected progress in English and in mathematics, for example, are consistently well-above average. This improvement across most subjects reflects the school's heavy investment in improving the quality of teaching and in providing increasingly well-planned and timely interventions for the minority of students who are not consistently on-track to achieve well.
- In broad terms and with minor variations, different groups of students achieve at a similarly good rate. This includes disabled students and those with special educational needs and the most able.

- Scrutiny of students' work in their exercise books, including in KS3, indicates that over time, students make consistently good or better progress, including in the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills. This analysis also confirms that teachers and leaders have an accurate grasp of how well students are acquiring, extending and applying key skills and knowledge in a range of subjects. This provides a secure base to enable students to fulfil their potential as they progress through the school and beyond.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

- Teachers enjoy purposeful working relationships with students which creates a positive climate for learning. In almost all lessons seen by the reviewer, students were willing to answer questions and talk productively about their learning. Teachers' expectations are routinely high and are rigorously enforced. Students' responses to teachers' feedback in books along with the corresponding responses from teachers are improving.
- Students spoken to by the reviewer were overwhelmingly positive about their experience at Penair School. They appreciate that staff routinely go 'the extra mile' to provide support in lessons and beyond. Year 11 students commented upon how staff treat them with maturity and how this motivates them to give of their best. Along with Year 10 students, they were also highly complimentary about the quality of advice and guidance they had received in choosing options in KS4.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

- Students mostly respond positively to their teachers and each other. Transitions between lessons are very smooth – behaviour observed pre-school, and at break-time and lunchtime was calm and orderly. Students talked amicably to the members of staff who were on duty. Staff also effectively model the positive attitudes that students should adopt. Students' behaviour observed during the excellent assembly was exemplary.
- Records seen by the reviewer show a steady decline in behaviour sanctions such as exclusions, referrals to the isolation room and after-school detentions. This indicates that the school's 'behaviour for learning' policy is working well. Nonetheless, leaders appreciate that the maintenance of these positive trends over time is dependent upon ensuring that all staff have the necessary skills in behaviour management and providing additional support and training, when needed.
- Leaders have also successfully raised the aspirations of more vulnerable students by working closely with their families. Parents are now more willing to approach the school and have worked with staff to address difficulties that individual students might be facing.
- Improving the erratic attendance of students has been a major focus for leaders. The strategies put in place by the school have effectively increased students' rates of attendance, including some of the most vulnerable.
- Robust systems are now embedded to support students whose attendance is a cause for concern. Consequently, attendance by May 2016 had risen to 95.25%, placing it in the

second quartile nationally from the bottom quartile at the time of the Ofsted inspection. Persistent absenteeism (PA) also reduced over the same period from 9.3% to 4.1% using the previous PA definition of 15% absence.

- The school highlights the importance of regular attendance exceptionally well, including making absolutely explicit for students and their parents/carers the link between attendance and achievement outcomes. Students spoken to by the reviewer were able to report their own attendance in this term to date by referring to their planners. They acknowledge that the focus on rewards for 96%+ attendance and, especially, 100% attendance, is highly motivating. Governors also are now much better informed about attendance trends and, therefore, able to exercise their monitoring role effectively.

### **Leadership and management**

The review covered several key aspects in addition to those reported in the PP section:

- Self-evaluation is comprehensive and accurate. Leaders analyse a range of performance data effectively and have constructed workable plans to secure improvement in the most important areas. They are aware that some aspects of the school improvement plan (SIP) and the summary of self-evaluation (SEF) would benefit from some further refinements/streamlining.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is a key strength and is improving. Senior leaders articulated passionately the importance of consistency in the application of the school's clear and ambitious vision. Senior staff are unequivocal that teaching and learning are their main priorities and have little time for 'gadgets and gimmickry' that provide only short-term fixes. Teachers and middle leaders are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their own classrooms and departments. Lesson observations and faculty reviews are triangulated to ensure consistency in observation and feedback techniques.
- The promotion of SMSC is highly effective. The splendidly managed whole-school assembly observed by the reviewer conveyed a very powerful message about the importance of participation and respect for one's opponents in the context of the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio. The level of student engagement while they watched clips demonstrating determination and sportsmanship was remarkable. The high quality displays of students' work throughout the school and in the entrance to the reception provide strong messages about achievement and success.
- Governors hold the school to account effectively. They know the school well and are becoming increasingly adept at providing challenge to leaders, including with regard to how well different groups of students are achieving. Governors are clear about the full range of their responsibilities, including with regard to safeguarding.