

PENKETH HIGH SCHOOL

When Penketh High School, located in Warrington, was judged to be a “Good” provider by Ofsted in 2020, it had been over 12 years since the school had last received a similar judgement. Three consecutive inspections from 2010 judged that the school required improvement or was only providing satisfactory provision. During that period, Ofsted had identified that teaching was variable and “not consistently good”, pupil attainment was “below national average” and students did “not challenge themselves to reach the highest levels”, nor were they “encouraged to improve this by all staff”.

From the last inspection in 2015, outcomes continued to steadily decline and by 2017 were significantly below national average. In the same year Penketh joined The Challenge Academy Trust (TCAT), a cross phase group of schools and a college, operating in collaboration to improve the standard of education in Warrington.



TCAT appointed John Carlin as the Principal in September 2017. A number of leadership appointments followed to support the school to deliver the strategic vision, which is guided by three key strands: academic development, holistic development and ensuring positive life chances for pupils who attend the school.

The initial phase of school improvement focused on creating the conditions to facilitate success. Higher expectations and standards ensured that the conduct of pupils improved significantly and the introduction of the ‘learning score’ system allowed leaders to monitor the engagement levels of pupils, even on a lesson by lesson basis.



The staff took a collective approach; ensuring consistency in the messages that pupils were receiving, and this enhanced learning focus and empowered both pupils and staff.

Professional development of staff became a key driver and an holistic approach meant that staff received bespoke input relevant to their needs and career stage. A whole school approach to curriculum also afforded departments time and resources to redesign their curriculums to better the experience of pupils in the classroom. These strands of professional development were all underpinned by the best research and a culture of professional dialogue that had been lacking at the school.





Undertaking an evidence-based approach, the staff understood the importance of the wider development of pupils; to broaden horizons and instil passions for life. A comprehensive enrichment programme was introduced, with a programme of over fifty enrichment activities available, including opportunities delivered by the school's own makerspace; SPARK at Penketh, founded in 2018.

The development of a unique 'career cluster' programme meant that pupils had access to a greater degree of career advice, information and guidance to consider how their progress in school could support future successes.

This work ensured significant improvement in the outcomes of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4. The proportion of pupils achieving at least a grade 5 in both Maths and English significantly improved,



as did the proportion of those achieving a grade 4; increasing by 10% and sitting above the national average.

Each of the three Ofsted inspections between 2010 - 2015 had raised concerns about the performance of pupils in Maths, with progress being described as "too low". By 2019 both attainment and progress had significantly improved, with the department achieving a positive progress score and 80% of pupils achieving at least a grade 4.



In contrast to the previous decade, the staff at Penketh had positively secured change, undertaking transformational work on a collective basis to bring about rapid and sustainable improvements to the culture of the school; whilst pupils rose to the challenge of meeting higher expectations now aligned with their capabilities.

In February 2020, Ofsted stated "Parents and carers, pupils, and staff say the headteacher has transformed school leadership" and that "The headteacher and trustees promote the highest of ambitions for all pupils. They are determined to provide the best for them."

The inspection also found that "The hard work of staff contributes to the good quality of education that pupils receive", reporting that "Pupils now benefit from a good quality of education, day in, day out." Crucially, the inspection identified that detailed curriculum work undertaken had positively impacted on pupils, highlighting that "Teachers help pupils to remember by placing emphasis on ambitious and interesting activities. These opportunities stretch and excite pupils' thinking, so they achieve especially well."