

The Purbeck School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113855
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	378761
Inspection dates	15–16 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Christopher Wood HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	955
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Peter Scupholme
Headteacher	Mr Richard Holman
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was conducted by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed 54 lessons taught by 54 teachers. This included a number of joint observations with school leaders. During the inspection, meetings were held with school staff, four members of the governing body, the school evaluation partner and four groups of students from Years 9 to 13. Inspectors visited tutor groups and two year-group assemblies. Inspectors scrutinised the school's self-evaluation, policies, improvement plans and documents relating to the tracking of students' progress. They also analysed the responses to questionnaires returned by 95 parents and carers, 158 students and 26 members of the school staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The rate of progress made by all students, particularly lower to middle-attaining boys in Key Stage 4, to ascertain whether teaching is appropriately adapted and/or sufficiently challenging.
- The extent to which the school's care, guidance and support have promoted quickly improving outcomes for all students, particularly in terms of their well-being and attendance.
- The extent to which the curriculum, including the school's specialism, has led to improving outcomes for students, particularly in terms of their achievement.
- The extent to which the actions of leaders at all levels have led to sustained improvement since the last inspection.

Information about the school

The Purbeck School is an average-sized secondary school. Students join the school in Year 9. The school is subject to a local reorganisation of education. From September 2013, the school will take students from Year 7 onwards. Most students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below the national average as is the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is about half the national average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than that seen nationally. The school has held specialist status for science since September 2004.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The Purbeck School provides students with a satisfactory standard of education. Some aspects of the school's work are good and its systems for keeping students safe are excellent. Successful partnerships and good care, guidance and support mean that students' personal development and well-being are fostered well. Since the previous inspection, leaders have focused resolutely on improving students' attendance with the result that it is now above the national average. Provision for students whose circumstances make them vulnerable is of a high quality. The arrangements to support students when joining the school are also well established. One parent spoke for others when commenting, 'The transfer from middle school to Purbeck was handled very well and the particular concerns I had were addressed.'

Students make satisfactory progress during their time at the school. By the end of Year 11, their attainment is similar to the national average and their achievement is satisfactory. The school's science specialism contributes fruitfully to the school's wider work and achievement in the specialist subjects has improved steadily. Although dipping in 2011, students have generally made good progress and achieved well in mathematics. Students' progress has been weaker in English. This has led, in part, to an overall decline in achievement following the previous inspection. However, leaders have tackled this issue robustly and their well-devised actions have secured discernible improvements this year. Inspection evidence indicates that this trend of steady improvement is set to continue. Nevertheless, leaders are rightly focused on ensuring that students' progress is monitored more closely across all subjects and that teachers make better use of the information they have about students' prior learning to plan lessons that promote faster progress.

Teaching is satisfactory and improving steadily. In the best lessons, students make good progress because they are quickly engaged in activities that are challenging and encourage high levels of participation. In these lessons, teachers use good questioning techniques to develop students' understanding or to extend their thinking. However, the quality of teaching is inconsistent. In some lessons, teachers talk for too long and there are limited opportunities for students to work independently or collaboratively. Moreover, although often imaginative, the planned activities are not always sufficiently well matched to the needs of students of different abilities. Consequently, students sometimes become passive and the pace of their learning drops.

The school's engagement with parents and carers is satisfactory. School leaders have

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introduced new systems to ensure that parents and carers are better informed about their children's progress but these will need time to become embedded fully and be more widely accessible. Moreover, although leaders and the governing body have a general understanding of the views of parents and carers, they are yet to evaluate these systematically in order to support the strategic development of the school's work.

The headteacher and his senior team are committed to the school's future improvement, particularly within the context of the significant changes that are taking place as a consequence of the reorganisation of education in the area. Their self-evaluation is broadly accurate and this has enabled them to focus on the most important priorities. Leadership at all levels is improving as a result of successful appointments in key areas. Together, leaders have begun to secure discernible improvements to provision and outcomes following a period of decline. Consequently, there is satisfactory capacity to sustain and build on these improvements in the future.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement in all subjects, but particularly in English, by ensuring that:
 - leaders at all levels monitor more closely the progress made by students
 - teachers make better use of the information they have about students' prior learning to plan lessons that promote faster progress.
- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by ensuring that teachers:
 - plan lessons that are better matched to the needs of students of different abilities
 - encourage students to participate more actively in their learning through independent and collaborative work
 - utilise good questioning techniques to develop students' understanding and extend their thinking.
- Improve the effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers by ensuring that:
 - the new systems which inform parents and carers about their children's achievement are fully embedded and widely accessible
 - leaders and the governing body systematically evaluate the views of parents and carers to better inform the strategic direction of the school's work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress in lessons and during their time at school. Inspectors

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specifically tracked a sample of lower and middle-attaining boys, a group that had been identified as underachieving, and found that their progress was satisfactory. In general, students apply themselves well in lessons, respond positively to direction by the teacher and sometimes work with good enthusiasm, especially when given opportunities to participate more actively in their learning. Consequently, they are adequately prepared for their future education and/or careers and their achievement is satisfactory. By the end of Year 11, the proportion of students who attain five or more GCSE examination passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics is broadly similar to the national average. Nevertheless, leaders remain sharply focused on ensuring that any variations in the performance of different subjects is minimised so that overall achievement improves.

Students enjoy school. This is shown in their above average attendance and good behaviour. Students say that bullying is rare. They feel safe and trust teachers to help them to sort out problems when they arise. Students participate enthusiastically in sporting activities and gain a good understanding of how to stay healthy through the curriculum, particularly in science and in personal, social and health education. Most try to adopt healthy lifestyles. Students contribute to the school and local community through their roles as mentors and sports leaders and their involvement in environmental projects, for example those linked to The National Trust. Nevertheless, students rightly acknowledge that there are currently limited formal opportunities to share their views and to contribute to the school’s decision making processes. There are regular opportunities for students to develop their talents in art, music and drama. For example, inspectors noted one group of Year 10 students who were eagerly discussing forthcoming auditions for the school production of ‘Hairspray’, while Year 11 students responded positively to an assembly led by a visiting poet. Through citizenship lessons and educational visits, for example, those to Kenya and the Holocaust Museum, students develop a mature understanding of different cultures and social contexts. As a result, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Of the lessons observed by inspectors, 56% were judged to be good or better and of these, 10% were outstanding. There was a close level of agreement between inspectors and school leaders who undertook joint observations. In the best lessons, teachers:

- use their secure subject knowledge and understanding of students' prior learning to plan imaginative lessons that promote good progress
- use good resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), to engage students quickly
- employ carefully targeted questions to challenge the students' thinking and develop the quality of their responses
- provide students with helpful feedback that enables them to understand how to improve their work and achieve their personal targets.

However, there is currently too much inconsistency. Students are sometimes passive in lessons because activities are not adapted sufficiently well to their different abilities. Moreover, some teachers talk for too long and there are sometimes limited opportunities for students to participate actively in their learning. This means that students do not always have time to complete or get the best out of the more challenging work that is usually planned. Consequently, their progress, albeit satisfactory, slows. Generally, work is marked regularly. Written feedback provides guidance that helps students improve. However, this is also sometimes inconsistent.

The good curriculum is reviewed annually to meet the needs of changing cohorts. It offers a balanced range of academic and vocational pathways, underpinned by good partnership with local schools, colleges and businesses. The choice of specialist science subjects has broadened. There are regular projects between science and other subject areas and successful outreach work with other schools, for example, the popular science festival. Students enjoy and participate enthusiastically in a variety of enrichment opportunities. While cross-curricular provision is mostly good, the school is rightly focused on ensuring that its approaches to literacy and numeracy are seen to have a greater impact on students' achievement.

Care, guidance and support are good. Some aspects are exemplary, such as the quality of support provided for individual students whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. The provision made for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities through the inclusion unit is excellent. In particular, this has led to significant improvements in the students' attendance and well-being. Partnerships

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with external agencies are strong and arrangements for supporting students when they join the school in Year 9 are often praised by parents and carers. The information, advice and guidance given to students when making their option choices are good. The school tracks students’ progress carefully and provides parents and carers with regular information about their children’s achievement. However, some parents and carers feel less well informed about their children’s progress and are uncertain about how they can help to support their children’s learning.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and school leaders are committed to raising students’ achievement. Staff are proud to work at the school. Broadly accurate self-evaluation enables leaders to identify those areas of the school’s work that need to improve most urgently. For example, through recognising the decline in overall students’ achievement, leaders have successfully tackled the underperformance in English. Leaders set challenging targets and regularly monitor students’ progress and the quality of teaching. Nevertheless, while the broad impact of their work can be seen in the steadily improving quality of provision, it will take additional time before actions have a full impact on achievement. The effectiveness of the governing body is satisfactory. It understands the school’s strengths and weaknesses and carries out its statutory duties efficiently. Members of the governing body make a strong contribution to monitoring attendance and safeguarding. However, governors are not fully involved in evaluating other aspects of the school’s work, in particular the school’s engagement with parents and carers which is currently satisfactory.

The school’s arrangements for keeping students safe are excellent. All aspects of policy, practice and training are undertaken with high levels of care. Significantly, the school invites external scrutiny of this area and regularly disseminates best practice in other local schools. The school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination energetically. Incidents of racism are rare. Students often demonstrate a sensitive awareness of issues surrounding diversity. For example, in one lesson students explored maturely different forms of the family, multiculturalism and changing attitudes to homosexuality. However, variations in levels of students’ achievement since the previous inspection mean that this area is satisfactory. Community cohesion is also satisfactory. The school is a cohesive community. Nevertheless, while leaders demonstrate a clear understanding of the school’s context and promote community engagement, they have yet to fully evaluate the

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impact of their work in this area.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

During their time in the sixth form, students make satisfactory progress and attain examination results that are broadly similar to the national average. Retention rates are improving but are still below average. Students’ personal development is fostered well through a successful tutorial programme. The range of enrichment activities is impressive and students speak highly of them. The curriculum is regularly reviewed and offers a broadening range of academic and applied options.

Teaching is satisfactory and improving. In particular, while around half of the lessons observed were judged to be good or better, the proportion of outstanding lessons was higher than that in the main school. In the best lessons, students make good progress because they are personally motivated and challenged to develop their independent learning skills. In the least effective lessons, the pace of learning is sometimes too slow, which means that, as in the main school, students do not get the best out of the more challenging work that is planned.

Changes to the leadership of the sixth form have already brought about discernible improvements to systems such as target setting, assessment, the tracking of students’ progress and monitoring the quality of teaching. Leaders have also begun to address previous variations in the performance of different subject areas. Nevertheless, these changes are relatively new and have not had sufficient time to make a full impact on raising achievement.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	3
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire was lower than average. Most parents and carers were happy with their children’s experience at the school. Parents and carers often noted in their written comments that school staff were committed and that pastoral care was ‘fantastic’. A minority felt that the school did not deal with unacceptable behaviour adequately. However, inspectors found that students’ behaviour was good in lessons and around the school site. Some parents and carers felt that the communication between school and home could be improved. While there are new systems in place that inform parents and carers about aspects of school life, inspectors agree that these systems need to be more widely available. Some expressed concerns about the rate of progress made by their children, often as a result of perceived variations in the quality of teaching. Inspectors judged teaching to be satisfactory and agree that inconsistencies hinder students making faster progress in their learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Purbeck School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 95 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 955 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	27	28	55	58	12	13	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	20	21	62	65	8	8	1	1
The school informs me about my child’s progress	21	22	51	54	9	9	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	21	45	47	16	17	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	18	19	56	59	13	14	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	12	13	52	55	20	21	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	13	14	62	65	14	15	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	16	17	62	65	9	9	1	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	20	21	57	60	8	8	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	10	11	55	58	15	16	5	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	12	13	55	58	12	13	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	17	18	55	58	14	15	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	20	21	58	61	10	11	3	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



19 September 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The Purbeck School, Wareham, BH20 4PF

You may remember that I visited your school with a team of inspectors recently to see how well you were doing. Thank you for the time you took to talk to us. Here are some of the things that we found out. Your school and sixth form provide you with a satisfactory standard of education. Although the school's performance declined following the previous inspection, it is once again improving. You make satisfactory progress in lessons and your GCSE and A-level examination results are broadly similar to those of other students nationally. School leaders recognise that until recently your performance in English has been weaker. As a result of their actions and your hard work, results in English improved in 2011. Some aspects of the school's work, such the care, guidance and support that you receive, are good. The help you get from the inclusion unit is exemplary. The extent to which the school keeps you safe is excellent. Teaching is satisfactory and just over half is good or better. The best teaching is challenging and gets you quickly engaged in your learning. However, some teaching does not develop sufficiently your skills of independent learning.

You enjoy learning and your behaviour is good. You say that bullying is rare and you trust teachers to help you sort out any problems that arise. Your attendance has improved so that it is now above average. Well done! You are keen to develop your talents in art, music and drama. The forthcoming production of 'Hairspray' will, I am certain, utilise all your skills. You understand the importance of being healthy and most try to do so. Although you say that teachers are generally interested in your views, you are right to suggest that the school could provide you all with more formal opportunities to discuss your opinions and to influence decision making. Your headteacher and I have agreed that the school should do three things in order to improve.

- Ensure that your achievement improves in all subjects, particularly in English.
- Increase the proportion of good or better lessons and ensure that you are actively involved in learning and make faster progress.
- Improve the opportunities that your parents and carers have to find out how you are doing and use their ideas to help the school improve further.

You can all help by continuing to attend school regularly and participating fully in lessons when teachers plan more challenging things for you to do.

Yours sincerely

Chris Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector

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