

Portland Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105037
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	377166
Inspection dates	18–19 June 2012
Lead inspector	Heather Simpson

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	208
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kathy Smith
Headteacher	Mary Walker
Date of previous school inspection	9 July 2008
School address	Laird Street Cloughton Birkenhead CH41 0AB
Telephone number	0151 6525124
Fax number	0151 6533271
Email address	schooloffice@portland.wirral.sch.uk



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

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.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



© Crown copyright 2012

Introduction

Inspection team

Heather Simpson
Michael Blaylock

Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 16 lessons taught by nine teachers. They listened to pupils read, spoke with them about their learning and looked at the work in their books. Meetings were held with parents and carers, a member of staff from the local Children's Centre, members of the governing body and staff. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation including the school improvement plan, assessment and tracking records, the school's evaluation of its work and documents relating to the safeguarding of pupils. Inspectors analysed 79 parents' and carers' questionnaires in addition to those completed by pupils and staff.

Information about the school

Portland Primary School is an average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. Most of the pupils are White British and a very small minority comes from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, including those supported by School Action Plus and with a statement, is average. The number of pupils who join or leave the school other than at the normal time is above average. The school meets the current floor standards which are the minimum standards set by the government for attainment and progress.

The school has achieved a number of national accreditations including the International Schools award, National Healthy Schools status, the Dyslexia-Friendly award and a Quality Mark for basic skills.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key Findings

- This is a good school. Pupils are given opportunities to thrive, develop and achieve as a result of rich curriculum experiences and good teaching. The school is not yet outstanding because pupils make good progress across the school and there are some variations in the quality of teaching.
- Pupils' achievement is good. On entry to Nursery, children's skills and knowledge are below those expected for their age. Attainment is rising and is broadly average by the end of Year 6. However, there is some variability in the rates of progress between classes.
- Teaching is generally of good quality and sometimes it is outstanding. Teachers manage pupils exceptionally well and foster very positive relationships. Lessons are generally well-planned and learning activities are adapted to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. However, occasionally pupils do not get enough opportunity to learn independently and work is not always challenging enough in all lessons. The marking of pupils' work is regular and positive, but pupils are not always given the opportunity to build on teachers' written comments or to evaluate their own work or that of others.
- Pupils have extremely positive attitudes to learning, behave exceptionally well and gain a very comprehensive understanding of how to keep safe. The school is very effective in minimising the impact of any inappropriate behaviour on the learning of other pupils. Pupils, parents and carers overwhelmingly feel that the school is a safe place to learn.
- The inspirational leadership of the headteacher, alongside strong support from the leadership team, sets a clear, shared vision of high expectation. Their relentless determination has led to significant improvements. Teaching and performance management are led and managed very effectively. The emphasis on promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement further by improving the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding through:
 - ensuring that lessons consistently challenge all pupils
 - giving pupils greater responsibility and more time to work independently without too much direction from adults
 - providing more opportunities to share the best teaching practice in school
- ensuring that pupils have enough time to respond to teachers' comments in marking and assess their own learning and that of their peers.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Progress in almost all lessons observed was at least good. Pupils enjoy learning and teachers plan work that motivates pupils to work hard. The very large majority of parents and carers who returned the questionnaires feel that their children are making good progress and inspectors endorse this view. One parent or carer expressed the view typical of many, saying 'my son loves going to school and he has come on so well'. Children join the Nursery with attainment levels well below those expected for their age. They make good progress within the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children are provided with exciting learning opportunities to extend their personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy skills. They are encouraged to make choices and there is good use of the indoor and outdoor learning environments. Consequently, by the time they enter Year 1, many pupils are catching up with others of a similar age.

In Key Stage 1, attainment is rising steadily, especially in mathematics, which is now in line with the national average. Pupils continue to make good progress as they move through the school and attainment by the end of Year 6 is broadly average in English and mathematics. This was evident in lessons observed during the inspection where pupils confidently developed their letter-writing skills and added numbers with one or two decimal places. Gaps are narrowing for all groups compared to all pupils nationally. All groups, including pupils who are eligible for free school meals, make better than expected progress when compared to similar groups nationally. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because they receive well-targeted teaching and support to help them overcome their difficulties. The number of pupils who join the school other than at the usual time is high. Their abilities are assessed on entry and additional support provided as necessary. Consequently, they are quickly integrated and make good progress.

Attainment in reading is broadly average in Year 2 and above average in Year 6. Pupils in Years 2 and 3 who read to inspectors said that they enjoyed reading and they were able to use strategies they had been taught to tackle unfamiliar words. Pupils' work in a range of subjects is good. They have opportunities to use and apply their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum including science, history, geography and information and communication technology (ICT).

Quality of teaching

Almost all parents and carers rightly consider that teaching is good. Teachers are enthusiastic and use a wide range of techniques to interest and involve pupils. They have high expectations of pupils and manage their behaviour very successfully. Very positive relationships pervade in all classrooms and this allows teaching to flow without interruption. Teachers promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well in lessons by encouraging discussion and drawing on recent and current events, for example the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the Olympic torch relay.

Where teaching is most successful, it draws on pupils' own experiences and links learning to real purpose. This was very evident in a Year 6 lesson when pupils had to write a letter of thanks to a recent visitor to the school. The teacher skilfully developed pupils' empathy and understanding, but remained focused on the literacy skills needed and the quality of the work produced. Pupils demonstrated maturity, respect and consideration throughout this lesson due to the high expectations established by the class teacher. This lesson also provided an opportunity to promote and instil important values, further develop moral and cultural awareness, but also capitalise on extending pupils' writing skills.

Work is generally carefully planned and teachers have good subject knowledge which they use to extend pupils' skills and understanding. Teaching assistants support all groups effectively, including those with special educational needs, by clarifying instructions, giving further explanations or posing additional questions. However, there are some variations in the quality of teaching. A few lessons are less effective. In such lessons rates of progress are slower because tasks are not as stimulating.

Children in the Early Years are provided with an appropriate balance between adult-led and child-initiated learning, but there are fewer opportunities in other year groups for pupils to learn independently and this can also slow pupils' rate of progress, on occasion. Marking generally indicates what pupils need to do next to improve their work. In the best examples seen, pupils set improvement targets for their peers and self-evaluate their own learning, but this is not consistently used across the school. In a few lessons pupils do not have enough time to respond to teachers' comments and so do not benefit fully from the guidance provided.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

'Polite, Pleasant People at Portland' is the mantra of the school and this was clearly evident during the inspection. Pupils have very positive attitudes to their education which are instilled and developed at every opportunity by all staff. Adults continually model respect and good manners and pupils themselves have adopted these values. Excellent relationships both in the classroom and more widely across the school underpin the ability for pupils to work together collaboratively and treat each other with respect. Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. They are polite and friendly to peers and visitors alike and show great care and consideration towards others. Parents and carers have positive views about pupils' behaviour and feel they are well looked after. Pupils themselves believe behaviour to be good and say that any inappropriate behaviour is dealt with effectively. Pupils have good levels of responsibility for their own conduct and peer mediators are effectively used to supervise younger pupils and resolve any conflict issues that arise in the playground. .

Pupils show a high awareness of unsafe situations and recognise the school as a safe place where teachers care for them very well. They are very aware of what may constitute bullying and of the various forms bullying may take. School records show that incidents of harassment, racism or bullying are rare. This is confirmed by pupils who report that if any problems arise, prompt and swift action is taken. The school's strategies to promote attendance, including an activities week during the inspection with an enriched curriculum, are proving highly effective in securing and sustaining attendance that is now average and improving rapidly.

Leadership and management

Excellent leadership and management have accelerated the rate of school improvement. Since the last inspection, levels of attainment and attendance have risen and the quality of teaching has improved. This impressive track record demonstrates the school's outstanding capacity to improve further. A good number of parents and carers made highly-positive comments about Portland, typically describing it as 'the best school by far' and commenting that 'I tell everyone to put their children in this school. It is amazing!'

The headteacher and senior staff lead by example and share an ambitious vision for the school. They are both supported and challenged by a very proactive governing body, which is fully involved in shaping the direction of the school. Governors have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas in need of improvement. They are linked to individual classes and visit the school to observe teaching. Teamwork is strong and staff morale is high. Robust monitoring of both teaching and non-teaching staff ensures that all staff are held accountable for the achievement of their pupils. A strong emphasis on professional development means that the skills of individual members of staff are fostered and developed to meet the school's needs. School leaders have very high aspirations and are continually seeking to improve the school further. They are fully aware of the need to share the outstanding teaching practice in school to bring the quality of all teaching in line with the very best.

There is a strong commitment to equality of opportunity for all pupils to succeed. The curriculum is broad and balanced and contributes strongly to pupils' excellent personal social and academic development. The school fosters the expertise and shared vision of its partnerships to develop further. Pupils benefit from the school's strong partnerships with parents, local schools, St James' Children's Centre and Tranmere Rovers' Football Club. Specialist teaching enhances pupil skills in music and sport. Cultural awareness is promoted with pupils studying a variety of other countries and learning to speak French or Spanish in Key Stage 2. An extensive range of visits and visitors enrich the curriculum and provide many memorable experiences.

Safeguarding is given a high priority, and arrangements for keeping children safe are very well managed. Leaders ensure the safe recruitment of staff, make full checks on any adult working in the school, and are vigilant about site safety. Staff are well trained in child protection and qualified in first aid.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



20 June 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Portland Primary School, Birkenhead, CH41 0AB

Thank you very much for the warm and friendly welcome you gave us when we came to visit your school recently. We appreciate all the help you gave us. A special 'thank you' goes to the School Council who gave up some of their lunchtime to talk to the inspectors and tell us what makes your school so special. You told us that you are happy at school and you said you feel safe. Your headteacher leads your school extremely well. Your behaviour is exemplary and you look after each other very well. Your school provides you with a good education and by the time you leave at the end of Year 6, your levels of attainment are broadly average.

We have asked your headteacher, staff and governors to do a number of things to make your school even better. We have asked your teachers to help you make even better progress by setting work which is a bit more difficult in some lessons and by allowing you to work on your own sometimes. We have also asked your teachers give you enough time to respond to their marking and to let you check your own work and the work of others in your class to see if you can identify ways you could improve it next time.

You can help to improve your school by continuing to work hard and attending school regularly.

We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Heather Simpson
Lead Inspector

