

# Portland College

## Independent specialist college

<b>Inspection dates</b>		25-27 September 2012
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	Requires improvement-Grade 3
	Previous inspection:	Good-Grade 2
Outcomes for learners		Good-Grade 2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-Grade 3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-Grade 3

### Summary of key findings for learners

#### This provider requires improvement because:

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in classroom settings, varies far too much and is not yet consistently good across all subjects.
- A few important aspects of the college's work are not monitored rigorously enough. This includes checking to make sure all the progress students make is captured effectively and ensuring all lessons are planned to help students learn as much as they can in the time available.
- The range and number of external work experience opportunities is too small. This means the chance for some students to develop a wider range of work-related skills is limited.
- Managers and the governing body do not review in enough detail how well different groups of students are performing and achieving over time.

#### This provider has the following strengths:

- Students' achievement of qualifications is high and most students progress successfully into further education and/or supported independent living.
- Students enjoy their experience at college and get on well with their peers.
- Specialist therapeutic, communication and physiotherapy support is very good and helps the majority of students make good progress overall, particularly in improving their self confidence and their skills for independent living.
- Students benefit greatly from a calm and spacious learning environment. Accommodation and specialist resources are of a good standard and very well maintained.
- Much strategic leadership and partnership working is strong. The college has ensured the successful move and integration of students with autistic spectrum disorders from Whitegates College.

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## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure all teachers use students’ initial assessment information to plan learning activities carefully, particularly in formal lessons and for groups of mixed ability. Where students are returning for another year, teachers need to differentiate clearly students’ prior learning and capabilities. This way, all activities can be sufficiently challenging and the pace of learning and progress can be maximised.
- Ensure managers at all levels apply every aspect of quality improvement with equal rigour. Measure and monitor thoroughly the impact of staff support, training and performance management so that swift action can be taken if rapid improvement is not evident. Increase specific and targeted training and mentoring for staff and managers, including agency staff, who are not yet fully confident in working with new types of students.
- Reduce the variability in the quality of assessment by ensuring staff use the comprehensive information on individual students collated by the college to provide a clear and robust base line by which to measure students’ target achievement and all their steps in learning. Ensure staff clearly define all students’ targets so that they are specific to the subject and focus more on the skills they are expected to develop rather than the tasks they are expected to complete.
- Systematically share the very best teaching, learning and assessment practice that exists across the college so that all staff, including learning support staff can benefit. Ensure all college managers provide teachers with sufficiently detailed verbal and written feedback on lessons so teachers are clear about what they need to prioritise to improve the quality of sessions.
- Strengthen the reporting of equalities monitoring and reporting further by ensuring managers analyse data and report on the performance of different groups of students in greater detail, including by qualification level. Additionally, provide the governing body with clearly summarised, cohesive equalities reports so they are better placed to ask challenging questions of managers if any gaps in achievement or variation in students’ views emerge over time.
- Extend the external work experience opportunities, particularly for the increased number of day students and students with autistic spectrum disorders, so they have a wide array of placements in which they can develop their employability skills.

## Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students’ achievement across a range of externally accredited qualifications is high, with the great majority of qualifications reflecting students’ gains in personal and independent living. The achievement of functional skills qualifications is also high. Students do not however always have sufficient opportunities to extend their functional skills further throughout all aspects of the curriculum.</li> <li>▪ Students enjoy coming to college and the majority make good progress, particularly in developing their communication skills; learning to make their own decisions; and in their interaction with others. For example, a student who previously had problems communicating was able to lead a sports session for other students successfully. Many students develop improved skills for independence and consequently are able to take increased control of their lives.</li> <li>▪ The initial information gained by the college before students start their programme of study, in order to assess students’ capabilities and identify their learning targets, is</li> </ul>	

very comprehensive. However, this information is not always compiled centrally or used by teachers to provide a robust baseline by which they can measure all steps in learning. The extent of progress made by some students therefore is not easy to determine.

- Inspectors agree with the college's data that all groups of students' achieve equally well when comparing their long-term goal achievement. The college does not however analyse and report equalities data in sufficient detail. For example, managers do not yet analyse students' outcomes by the level of accredited qualification.
- Through an array of college settings, including enrichment sessions, work experience and in the on-site residences, students constantly improve their ability to make choices. They gain a better understanding of the options available to them at college and become more involved in making decisions about their future lives.
- Progression to positive destinations on leaving the college is good with at least half of all leavers progressing to some form of further education over the last three years. Students benefit well from the staged support they receive on entering and leaving the college. In 2011/12, more students progressed successfully into supported independent living than in the previous year.
- An increasing number of students attend work experience sessions to improve their employability skills, such as working with others, time management and in travelling independently. The variety of external work experience options has extended notably but the number and variety of options remain insufficient. As a result, some students are not able to develop the full array of work-related skills they are capable of.

### The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. While strong personalised support for students contributes markedly to their outcomes being judged good overall, too much learning and teaching in classroom settings is not consistently good enough. Students' progress in too many formal lessons is not maximised.
- Inspectors observed some good and outstanding teaching and learning, but in too many lessons teachers did not use students' initial assessment information well enough to inform the planning of activities in order to extend learning. This is particularly evident in lessons with students of very mixed ability, where often tasks for more able students are insufficiently challenging and their progress is hindered.
- In the best lessons teachers engage students fully, ensure students know and understand their individual targets and encourage them to achieve as much as they can in the time. The pockets of outstanding teaching and learning practice are not shared routinely across all subjects to assist teachers.
- In the least effective lessons teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of what students are capable of learning, or do not have the confidence to apply new teaching strategies when the planned teaching methods are not working. In some cases, the rationale for the lesson and learning activities is unclear. As a result, subjects that should be stimulating to the senses, like music, are pedestrian.
- Teachers build a good rapport with their students. In many lessons teachers and learning support assistants work effectively in helping students make choices and decisions for themselves, whether it be a choice of colour pen they use, size of paper they work on, or where they sit in the room. In a few lessons, inspectors saw students working well to support their peers.
- In the majority of lessons, learning support assistants provide effective one-to-one support for students. In the best sessions, this support strikes an excellent balance between keeping students engaged and enabling them to think for themselves by the use of carefully phrased questions. In a minority of lessons however, teachers do not direct these staff effectively

and/or learning support staff verge on doing too much for students.

- Therapeutic, physiotherapy and communication support in lessons and residential units is very good and contributes significantly to students’ overall outcomes and the progress they make. These staff work closely with students to ensure they can participate more fully and gain as much independence as possible. Most students value highly the personalised support they receive.
- The use of specialist assistive technologies to support learning is good overall. Teachers and support staff often plan support sensitively and use technology well to enable students to take more control of situations. For example, in order to support one student with independent travel staff helped download photographs of local landmarks onto a discreet digital key ring to help the student locate his bus stop with confidence.
- The management of students’ behaviour by teachers and particularly support and care staff is good, both within and outside of lessons. The college has successfully managed the challenges of integrating students with autism from the Whitegates College merger into working in unfamiliar settings around the Portland College campus. This is a significant achievement for these students, preparing them well for their future lives.
- Students’ feedback confirms they like learning to develop their written English and their mathematics. In the majority of lessons, teachers plan and promote these skills appropriately but often opportunities are missed to reinforce and extend students’ English and mathematical understanding.
- Assessment and tracking of students’ progress against their targets requires improvement to ensure that it is consistently good and captures all the progress students make. Staff review students’ progress regularly but in several cases students’ targets in lessons are either far too broad, do not relate clearly enough to the subject, or are focused on completing tasks rather than on their skill development.
- Inspectors observed good promotion of equality and diversity in a minority of lessons. For example, in one lesson, students and teachers discussed the planning for a visit and one student, who was not a wheelchair user, reported confidently on his awareness of concessionary prices and potential hazards for wheelchairs users at the site. Teachers plan appropriately to incorporate equality and diversity themes in lessons but sometimes miss opportunities to reinforce these.
- Information, advice and guidance are good. Students receive a carefully staged transition when they first attend college and again when they are preparing for their chosen progression route and destination. Newly introduced formal ‘registration and planning’ sessions are helping new students settle quickly into college life.

**The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Requires improvement

- Senior leaders and the governing body provide an ambitious and clear vision for the college. Strategic partnership working is strong. Recently established links with local high street retailers is bringing about extended opportunities for students to engage with the community, for example, through new work experience opportunities.
- Senior leaders have managed the transition and integration of autistic students from the Whitegates College very well. Leaders have not yet however ensured all staff are fully confident or proficient to teach these different student cohorts effectively. The college recognises more work is required to support teachers originally from Whitegates and from Portland College, in understanding how best to teach students with autistic spectrum disorders or those with profound and multiple learning disabilities and/or difficulties.
- Curriculum management varies in its effectiveness and requires improvement. While some curriculum managers consider the timetabling of lessons carefully, ensure new and agency staff are supported appropriately, and ensure communication within departments is clear,

others do so less rigorously.

- Governors are highly experienced and use their expertise well to oversee the college's performance effectively in the large majority of areas. The governing body however, does not receive easy-to-interpret or cohesive reports on equalities. Therefore, governors are not always well placed to ask questions that are more challenging of senior managers on potential patterns or gaps in achievement, or variations in the views of different groups of students.
- College leaders are aware that teaching and assessment are not yet consistently good enough. Despite a good range of focused staff development and mentoring, strategies to improve the effectiveness of students' learning have had insufficient impact. Where improvement is not swift enough, or indeed evident, managers' use of performance management processes is not robustly holding all staff to account.
- Managers observe lessons regularly. Observers' feedback to teachers varies in the degree of detail given. As a result, teachers who gain detailed areas for development and action plans are better placed to improve their practice.
- Self-assessment processes and a system of continual performance review are well established. Leaders and managers know the strengths and areas for improvement of the college. Several aspects of quality improvement are good including the use of students' views to improve provision. In response to parental feedback, the college has set up a parent and carer forum on its website and has increased parental participation in students' care reviews.
- A few significant areas of quality improvement monitoring are not comprehensive enough. For example, action plans identify the need to improve the quality of lessons planning, individual students' target setting and assessment but the quality of these important areas are too variable. Senior managers recognise these issues and have very recently strengthened these processes further but it is too soon to see the impact of their actions.
- The curriculum, including enrichment, provides students with a wide choice of subjects and activities. The choice of vocational subjects and related work experience has extended notably over the last two years. Managers are aware that opportunities for external work experience needs extending much further, particular to meet the needs of its increasing number of day students and students with autistic spectrum disorders.
- The management of the college's small amount of subcontracted provision with a local general further education college is good. The subcontracted arrangement provides good flexibility for a small number of students who are able to access mainstream education. For example, one student is spending half of the week studying her vocational option at the local further education college and the remaining time improving her independence skills at Portland College.
- Managers and teachers promote a culture of respect and tolerance amongst students. Incidents of bullying are very low. Managers reinforce to students the need to make their own choices. The promotion of equality and diversity and a distinct focus on enabling students make choices for themselves are positive features of the college. Managers are in the process of strengthening the data used to monitor gaps in students' achievement.
- Significant investment in accommodation and specialist resources enables students to work and learn safely in calm and spacious learning environments. For example, the recent introduction of an interactive sensory room, with giant projectors on every wall, is helping students with autism to cope with and manage unfamiliar situations in a learning environment before they face them for real. The college meets its statutory requirements for the safeguarding of learners.

**Record of Main Findings (RMF 2012)**

**Portland College**

**Learning types:**

**16-18 learning programmes leading to qualifications:** FE full- and part-time courses;

**19+ learning programmes leading to qualifications:** FE full- and part-time courses

<b>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</b> 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>	16-18 Learning programmes	19+ Learning programmes
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>	3	3
Outcomes for learners	<b>2</b>	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>3</b>	3	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>3</b>	3	3

## Provider details

<b>Provider name</b>	
<b>Inspection dates</b>	25-27 September 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI
<b>Type of provider</b>	<b>Independent specialist college</b>
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16+
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b> [enter year eg 2010/11]	119
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Dr Mark Dale
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	29 February 2012
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.portland.ac.uk">http://www.portland.ac.uk</a>

<b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>				
<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 1 or below</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>
<b>Total number of full-time learners excluding apprenticeships</b>	127	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Apprenticeship level</b>				
	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>Higher</b>	
<b>Number of apprentices</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	
<b>Age of full-time learners</b>				
	<b>14-16</b>	<b>16-18</b>	<b>19+</b>	
<b>Total by age</b>	N/A	23	100	
<b>Number of part-time learners</b>				
	4			
<b>Number of main sites</b>				
	1			
<b>Funding received from</b>				
	Education Funding Agency (EFA)			
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following subcontractor:<sup>1</sup></b>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ West Nottingham College</li> </ul>			

<sup>1</sup> The main subcontractors only

## Additional socio-economic information

Portland College is a charitable independent specialist college for learners with autistic spectrum disorders and those with profound and multiple learning disabilities and/or difficulties. The college operates from a single campus near Mansfield, Nottinghamshire. The college enrolls learners from a wide geographical area. Just under half of all learners are residential and the remainder attend the college on a day basis. Some 12% of the learner cohort is of minority ethnic heritage.

In 2010/11, Portland College took over the funding contract for Whitegates College, a local college for learners with autistic spectrum disorders. The majority of Whitegates College learners and staff moved across to Portland College in September 2011.

Portland College provides a range of other programmes which were not in the scope of the inspection.

## Information about this inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the Assistant Principal for Learning and Teaching as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and emails to gather the views of learners and emails and college documentation to gather the views of parents and carers. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. These views are reflected throughout the report. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider that was funded by the Education Funding Agency (EFA).



## What inspection judgements mean

Provider		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding provider is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its learners' needs. This ensures that learners are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good provider is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its learners' needs. Learners are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A provider that requires improvement is performing less well than it might be reasonably expected in one or more of the key areas. This provider will receive a full inspection 12-18 months after the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A provider that is inadequate is one where the provider is failing to give its learners an acceptable standard of education and/or training and the provider's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the provider. This provider will receive a re-inspection within 12-15 months after the date of this inspection.

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