

Portland School and Specialist College

Uttoxeter Road, Blythe Bridge, Stoke-on-Trent, ST11 9JG

Inspection dates 1–2 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- All pupils arrive at the school with standards that are below and, for a majority, well below those expected for their age. This is because they have experienced disruptions in their education.
- Achievement is good. The headteacher and her senior leadership team have had a clear focus on managing behaviour through good teaching and learning. As a result, pupils make good and some make outstanding progress during their time at the school.
- Pupils' achievements are good because teaching is good. Teachers plan lessons which capture the pupils' interest so that they want to learn.
- Pupils quickly settle into the routines of the school because of the excellent care and guidance they receive from staff. They make huge gains in their personal development and begin to learn to manage their own behaviour effectively.
- Partnerships with parents and other agencies are particularly strong. This ensures that pupils get clear messages about the behaviour expected of them both at home and at school.
- Senior leaders and managers, including members of the governing body, have guided the school very well through a period of significant change. The school has quickly settled into its new role and is improving rapidly.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some of the changes the school has experienced in the last two years are still settling down. Although teaching is good and improving, not enough of it is outstanding in order to ensure every pupil is challenged to make the best progress they can.
- Attendance is good for younger pupils but there are a small group of older pupils who fail to attend regularly.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons taught by 14 teachers. Two of the lesson observations were undertaken jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with key stage leaders, literacy leaders, members of the governing body, the school's parent liaison worker, representatives of the child and adolescent mental health service and with senior leaders. Additionally, informal discussions took place with pupils and other members of staff during observations and around school.
- Telephone conversations were held with two representatives of the local authority.
- Pupils were heard to read during lessons. Their views about the school and how well they think they are doing were gathered at a meeting with members of the school council.
- School planning and safeguarding documents were reviewed. Pupil progress data, behaviour logs and performance management systems were scrutinised.
- An insufficient number of responses were made to the on-line Parent View questionnaire but inspectors took into account parent comments from review meetings.

Inspection team

Hilary Ward, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Stephen Helm

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- There have been substantial changes to the school's role since its previous inspection, following a review of special educational needs provision by the local authority. This has included a change of name and provision for pupils who have different special educational needs from those provided for previously. For most of last year the school operated from a temporary site while a building programme was completed to improve the current accommodation. The school moved back towards the end of the academic year 2012.
- The school now provides education for pupils with behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. There is also a Year 11 class of pupils with moderate learning difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- Since the change in designation there have been considerable staff changes and many of the pupils are also new to the school.
- At present, all pupils in the school are boys although the school can also offer places to girls.
- Over 80% of pupils are eligible for additional government funding through the pupil premium which, at this school, includes pupils who are entitled to free school meals and those in the care of the local authority. This is a much higher proportion than the national average. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school uses alternative providers for a small number of Key Stage 4 pupils in order to offer them vocational opportunities which the school is unable to provide. Placements are set up and managed by a highly regarded agency but are closely monitored by the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching further so that more of it is outstanding by:
 - planning more individualised intended outcomes and sharing with pupils what each of them is expected to have achieved by the end of every lesson
 - using marking more consistently to inform pupils how to improve their work
 - increasing opportunities, in all lessons, for pupils to practise extended pieces of writing.
- Further improve links with parents and other agencies to increase the attendance of the small minority of pupils who are persistently absent.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Following the changes in the school's provision, effective steps have been taken to ensure all pupils achieve well. All groups, including the very large number eligible for pupil premium funding, the remaining small group of pupils with moderate learning difficulties and those with higher ability, all make equally good progress.
- Pupils can be admitted at any age and throughout the school year. From low and, often, very low starting points, they make such good progress that an increasing number of leavers are now gaining GCSEs at lower grades in more subjects including English and mathematics. A wide range of other external awards are also achieved.
- Last year, all leavers went on to continuing education and this trend is predicted to continue. This is due largely to the excellent and supportive relationships which pupils enjoy with staff which raise their self-esteem and confidence so that they want to carry on learning and improving themselves.
- All pupils are assessed following admission and, where necessary, are provided with additional support to close the gaps in their learning due to missed schooling.
- Younger pupils develop the early reading skills which some have missed. The school teaches a phonics programme which helps pupils to understand the sounds letters make. One pupil said, 'I love reading. I never used to, but I do now, because I get help with the hard words'.
- Skills in English have improved since the previous inspection. Writing lags behind reading but is also beginning to show improvement. The school has adopted themes and subjects suggested by the boys themselves. This means they are much more willing to try writing but need more opportunity to practise extended writing across all subjects.
- When pupils arrive at school in the morning, a short time is spent on study skills, reading and preparing pupils for learning so that their time in school can be used most effectively.
- There are good links across the curriculum to promote pupils' mathematical skills. Very positive partnership work with other schools, to raise standards of teaching in mathematics, is showing good results.
- Placements in alternative provision are monitored by the school's senior leaders to ensure success for the small number of pupils involved. These placements provide Year 11 pupils with access to subjects, which the school cannot provide, such as horticulture and animal welfare.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is always at least good at this school and is improving over time. This is because a lot of thought has been given to planning a curriculum which will interest boys and engage them in learning.
- Lessons are well-planned and organised to provide a range of practical activities and tasks which will reinforce the learning. For example, in a mathematics lesson, younger pupils rotated round several different activities indoors and outdoors, measuring objects they found with different types of measure. As a result, they could understand bigger and smaller units of measurement.
- Planning indicates different learning objectives for groups in lessons but these are not always shared with individual pupils so that they know exactly what they are expected to achieve in the lesson.
- Verbal feedback and questioning of pupils in lessons, together with self-evaluation of their work, help pupils to understand how well they are doing. However, marking does not consistently suggest the next steps pupils could make in order to improve their work.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations for their pupils and encourage independent work, gradually building pupils' confidence to have a go at trying things for themselves. Teaching assistants support pupils' learning and behaviour very effectively so that

they enjoy learning in small groups with good support to keep them on task.

- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used by pupils to research and find things out for themselves. The ICT teacher has developed a scheme of work so that pupils can learn programming skills.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils behave well during lessons. They arrive promptly and settle quickly. Clear reward systems motivate pupils to do well to earn 'treat times'.
- When a pupil does occasionally experience difficulty, staff are well-trained to manage the behaviour so that there is no disruption to other pupils' learning and the pupil concerned can quickly rejoin the class.
- Over time pupils develop the skills they need to manage and reflect on their own behaviour, so that incidents reduce as they move up the school.
- The parent-liaison worker and other members of staff foster highly effective links with parents and carers to provide support to families and to ensure pupils are given consistent behaviour messages both at home and school.
- Parents are confident their children are safe in school. The very supportive relationships pupils enjoy with staff give them the confidence to be sure that any issues will be dealt with effectively. Pupils said that they understand about various types of bullying but do not have concerns about it in school. Pupils learn about safe internet use. Health and safety rules are promoted in lessons such as food technology and science.
- Pupils enjoy school. As a result, attendance has improved, particularly for younger pupils. There remains a very small minority of pupils at Key Stage 4 who do not attend as well as they should. Governors and senior leaders are aware of this and seek ways to motivate them to want to come to school. Sometimes this is by making alternative provision out of school and attendance at placements is monitored on a daily basis.
- Throughout their time in school great attention is paid to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They are encouraged to consider the needs of others through links with other schools and fund-raising activities. Pupils raised funds to buy Christmas presents for patients on a cancer ward at the local hospital. They wrapped the presents and took them personally to the patients and enjoyed chatting with them. A small group of older pupils are to visit The Gambia to help to build a school there.
- As a result of the trust and respect shown to pupils, their self-confidence and esteem increases so that by the time they leave they are well-equipped for their future lives.

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders and managers, including the governing body, have very ably guided the school through a period of significant change. It has settled remarkably quickly and is well positioned to continue to make rapid improvements.
- The headteacher and her senior team know their school well and have identified strengths and areas for development clearly. Monitoring of the many new teachers and teaching assistants is rigorous and ensures they are professionally developed to meet the changing needs of the pupil groups.
- The curriculum and school day have been reviewed recently and involved pupils and parents in decision making. Difficult times in the school day have been reduced and the curriculum is now well-suited to the needs and interests of the pupils.
- Although all pupils have social, emotional and behavioural needs, senior leaders share a strong focus on good teaching and learning as the best means of reducing inappropriate behaviour incidents. They undertake regular lesson observations to ensure they are well-matched to the needs of the pupil. As a result, the number of incidents has reduced over time in the school.

- Staff morale is high because everyone feels involved in decision making, valued and well-supported in adjusting what the school provides for the changing pupil groups. Every pupil is treated as an individual and given an equal opportunity to succeed, resulting in improved outcomes for pupils when they leave school.
- Parents are very appreciative of the support the school gives to them and productive partnerships with a range of external agencies, including mental health services, promote pupils' well-being exceptionally well.
- The local authority has been very involved in the changes to the school's role, negotiating building contracts and ensuring the school is well-equipped to meet the needs of the new pupil groups. They continue to have a monitoring role.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors play a full role in supporting the school and challenging senior leaders to continually raise standards. They recognise the need to strengthen the board further but existing members have a good range of skills and parents are well represented. Governors hold regular meetings with key stage leaders to monitor pupils' progress. They ensure the large number of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding achieve at least as well, and often better than, the rest. They monitor teacher performance and link it well to pay progression and to school improvement targets. Safeguarding and health and safety issues are given the highest priority.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	124498
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	402261

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ann Prophet
Headteacher	Angela Hardstaff
Date of previous school inspection	29 March 2010
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