

Portfield School

Parley Lane, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 6BP

Inspection dates 25–26 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students do not achieve as well as they should because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.
- Teaching is not always sufficiently well matched to students' individual needs.
- Teaching assistants are not always deployed effectively.
- Teachers, and especially teaching assistants, do not know students' targets, how they are to be reached or how planned activities will help them.
- Teachers do not have enough opportunities to learn from the good practice of others in and beyond the school.
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- The sixth form requires improvement. The quality of teaching varies and students do not always achieve as much as they could.
- Students do not achieve their full potential because of variations in the quality of teaching.
- Not all governors have sufficient training or information about current requirements to be able to carry out their roles effectively.
- Actions taken by senior leaders, including governors, have not yet had sufficient impact on teaching or achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- Students behave well and are safe because a high priority is placed on this by leaders, staff, students, parents and carers.
- Leaders, especially the headteacher, have a clear vision for teaching and learning. Strategic actions taken over the past year are making teaching increasingly relevant, meaningful and useful for all students.
- Governors are keen to develop their skills, understanding and roles in the school.
- Many students develop into friendly, helpful, caring young people. Others become calmer, more settled and more able to tolerate and interact with the world around them.
- Teaching staff have good relationships with other professionals including the school nurse and speech and language therapists; consequently, students are well looked after in relation to such particular needs.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 16 lessons taught by 12 teachers and three teaching assistants. Ten of these observations were joint visits with senior staff.
- Discussions were held with students, governors, the chief executive of the charity, senior and middle managers and staff, as well as with parents and carers.
- The charity’s Director of Portfield School Services was away on annual leave at the time of the inspection.
- There were too few responses to the online Parent View questionnaire for a report to be available. The inspector received the views of parents and carers through 12 responses to a school survey and informal discussions.
- The inspector received the views of staff through 53 responses to the inspection questionnaire and discussions, as well as views of students, through both informal and pre-arranged discussions.
- The inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a number of documents, including the school’s data on students’ current progress, the school’s development plan, planning and monitoring documents, documents relating to safeguarding, and records relating to behaviour and attendance.
- This inspection took place alongside the inspection of the charity’s respite and residential services. The inspectors of both inspections liaised throughout and presented their findings together. These findings, on the school and residential services, are reported separately.

Inspection team

Jo Curd, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Bob Coburn

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is part of Autism Wessex, a charity which runs a range of support, respite and residential services in Dorset.
- Three of the school's four senior leaders, including the headteacher, are new to their roles since the previous inspection. The headteacher and head of lower school joined the school just over a year ago. Prior to this, the school had been without a substantive headteacher for two years. The head of lower school took up this leadership position in April 2013.
- The school is based on two sites approximately five miles apart. The main site accommodates Key Stages 2, 3 and 4, as well as the most vulnerable students in Key Stage 5. Life Skills, the sixth form, is based in a large house near the centre of Christchurch.
- The school is registered for students from ages three to 19 years. There are currently extremely few students under the age of 11; the youngest students are in Key Stage 2.
- All the students have statements of special educational needs. They all have autism and complex learning difficulties at profound, severe or moderate levels.
- A very small minority of pupils are from ethnic backgrounds other than White British. None of the pupils have English as an additional spoken language. A large proportion are non-verbal and use signs and symbols to communicate.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is in line with the proportion in schools nationally, although the actual number is very small in a school where year groups are very small. The pupil premium is additional funding for specific groups of students, in this case those known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school has a long standing policy of using staff in residential services to support in classrooms. There is a very high turnover of these staff.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching so that all groups of students achieve more, by ensuring that:
 - all teachers learn from the good practice of others in and beyond the school
 - all teachers and teaching assistants, including those from the residential services, know: the aims and purpose of learning activities; targets for individual students and how to reach these in all lessons; and that they are all deployed effectively to enable all students to reach their targets.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.
- Further improve leadership and management by ensuring that leaders at all levels have time to monitor lessons more frequently, making sure that improvements in teaching and learning are implemented consistently and effectively throughout the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students' achievement is not sufficiently good, irrespective of their disabilities or special educational needs, and, too often, their progress is too slow.
- There are no significant differences in the rates of progress made by students of differing abilities, or by those from different ethnic backgrounds.
- Achievement currently varies because the quality of teaching is inconsistent across the school. It is improving because leaders are helping staff to focus on purposeful activities which will help each individual progress. These are being implemented more effectively in some classes than others.
- Although all the students are valued highly, the promotion of equality of opportunity requires improvement because pupils in some classes achieve more than in others.
- Achievement in Life Skills varies because the quality of teaching varies. Although most activities are relevant to preparing students for later life and learning, the lessons are not always sufficiently challenging. Most students attain basic recognised accreditations, especially those relating to employment and life skills, and most go on to residential colleges when they leave.
- Achievement in English and mathematics, including communication, numeracy and other basic cognitive skills, is improving because these subjects are given prominence in the timetable, but this improvement is not consistent across the school. Students are taught well in some classes and some are making good progress, especially in reading. Progress is slower in other classes because teaching assistants are not always deployed well and students sometimes have to wait passively rather than being actively involved in their learning.
- Students, particularly in Key Stages 2 and 3, frequently read or spend time with stories, books and other forms of print. More able students in Key Stage 3 enjoy reading and are beginning to understand a range of stories and genres. They are well motivated and some choose to spend their break times looking at books outside.
- Students with the most profound difficulties make varied levels of progress, according to the quality of teaching and support. In the best lessons they achieve well, for example showing initiative in continuing a relevant routine or communicating through well-organised symbols. Aims are less clear in other lessons, however, such as tracing over irrelevant phrases. This slows progress and relies on students' compliance.
- Achievement in other subjects also varies with the quality of teaching. Older students made good progress in a cookery lesson because the task was meaningful and well focused. Others made slower progress in a science lesson because learning aims were unclear and teaching assistants were unable to help guide or support students effectively.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively for bespoke therapies and additional activities for individual students. These help to reduce barriers to learning and assist students' development overall.
- Assessment data, showing how well each student achieves, were put in place after the previous inspection. However, some of these were not completely accurate and did not reflect what pupils knew, understood, or could do. More accurate systems have been in place for less than a year.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- School monitoring, lesson observations, students' work and discussions show that teaching over time varies in quality between classes throughout the school, including Life Skills. It is improving due to training and increased emphasis on checking individual students' progress. However, inspection findings confirmed leaders' views that it requires improvement because not enough is at least good.
- In some of the teaching, more purposeful activities are now being planned, prepared and

presented. However, activities are still not consistently well matched to individual needs throughout the school and staff are sometimes unsure of the aims of particular activities.

- Expectations of how well students will learn and achieve vary between classes. Some activities are inspiring, well matched to students' needs and relevant, whereas others have more limited purpose. Students were motivated and achieved well in a swimming lesson because they were all challenged to improve and were supported well; whereas progress was slower in an art lesson where the goal and finished product were less clear.
- Support is funded according to individual students' needs. Because so many of the students have such complex needs, there is sometimes a large number of adults in the classrooms. These staff are not all deployed effectively and their presence sometimes reduces students' motivation, concentration and independence. This is particularly true when staff are new and do not know students, lesson aims, or individual targets sufficiently well; this is not uncommon due to the very high turnover of support staff.
- Some teachers vary activities well, in and between lessons, to match different students' needs and abilities, and their rates of progress. Others keep too rigidly to their lesson plans and do not modify activities sufficiently to extend or support learning. This slows progress. For example, in a mathematics lesson, more able students had to wait until all those in the class had completed matching coins before they proceeded to use them to purchase items in a tuck shop.
- Teachers generally liaise well with parents and carers and provide additional work for students to do at home when this is appropriate and advantageous. Most of the parents and carers spoken to during the inspection, or who responded to the school survey, are happy with teaching because they say that relationships are good and their offspring are settled and safe.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour and safety are good because staff give this a high priority, meet all requirements for safety and have a good understanding about autistic spectrum disorders. They have all received training on behaviour and anxiety management techniques and they use these acquired skills well.
- Staff successfully manage or reduce students' anxieties and frustrations through carefully planned topics and a range of communication resources. There is very little disruption and lessons run smoothly. For example, a topic on the fire service, including a trip to a fire station, a visit from fire fighters and study of fire alarms, helped reduce the anxieties of some. A weekly visit from a specially trained support dog helps the communication and anxieties of others.
- The school effectively fosters good relationships and there is an absence of discrimination. Parents and carers are thrilled with the leaps that their offspring make in behaviour and attitude. All parents and carers spoken to, or who responded to the school survey, felt their offspring were safe. The very great majority said that their children had settled and developed well in the school, including some who had come from unsuccessful starts elsewhere.
- The school environment helps provide a positive ethos and safety for students. Doors are secure and visibility around the site is good. Leaders stress the importance of the environment for learning and all the rooms are arranged well to promote positive behaviour and learning. Some teachers use individual learning bays and space in rooms better than others, but this is improving.
- Despite their inherent difficulties, students show initiative, confidence and independence, for example choosing activities at break times, collecting registers from the office or showing visitors around the school.
- Students in Life Skills increase their knowledge, understanding and skills for later life through shopping, cooking and cleaning 'the flat'. More-able students are positive about behaviour, recognising just how much they have blossomed and developed.
- Students, who are able to, have a good understanding of different types of bullying and what to do to keep themselves safe, telling others to stop or asking someone to help if unsafe situations arise.

- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development varies across the school and in different contexts. Some students are excited and inspired by their learning because teaching is effective, whereas others have to wait passively. 'Reach' days offer all students special events such as 'visits' to different countries and cultures where they taste new food and have a go at playing an instrument such as the didgeridoo. Photographs show how interesting these events are and how much students enjoy them.
- Despite some considerable medical and health issues, attendance is in line with the national average for secondary schools.
- Occasionally, students are overly passive and dependent because there are too many adults in the room and activities are not clear, suitably paced or purposeful.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher has a successful track record, leading his previous school to outstanding effectiveness. He has a clear vision for teaching and learning which he has presented at length. Other leaders share this vision and an increasing number of staff are embracing it. This is having a positive impact on teaching and achievement, and both are improving, but not yet at a fast enough rate.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning is not yet fully effective in driving improvement. Visits to lessons are not frequent enough to ensure rapid development or to take teaching to a good or better level. Leaders do not provide sufficient time for teachers to share good practice, or learn from others in and beyond the school. This in turn limits the effectiveness of the school's performance management procedures.
- The school has a long standing policy of using staff in residential services to support in classes for one week in three. The high turnover of these staff means that they do not always have time to get to know students, understand the aims of lessons or become familiar with targets for learning. This reduces the impact of support they provide which, consequently, slows achievement.
- Leaders, including those in middle leadership and those in Life Skills, have an accurate view of the school and know which areas need improving. They have begun to tackle these successfully and are taking the school forward, albeit not at a fast enough rate. There are now new procedures for assessment, monitoring and training, and most staff are positive about these.
- Activities and opportunities for learning are increasingly student-centred, relevant and meaningful. Where teaching has improved, this has enhanced students' achievement, well-being and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The curriculum covers all required subject areas, including sports and fitness which help maintain students' health and well-being.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance requires improvement. Governors would welcome a review because they recognise that they do not have sufficient training to conduct their roles effectively under current requirements. They meet regularly, manage finances adequately and meet statutory duties, including those for safeguarding. However, the governors do not all have sufficient understanding of government expectations for teaching and achievement to be able to support and challenge the school on these. They are not sufficiently well informed about performance management. They are not able to identify details of effective practice, or know how well the school recognises and rewards this. They are not sufficiently well informed about the tackling of under performance. Governors do not have a sufficiently strong grasp of performance data.

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	113942
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	426712

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	59
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul McGee
Headteacher	Tyler Collins
Date of previous school inspection	10–11 November 2010
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