

Poltair School

Trevarthian Road, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 4BZ

Inspection dates

26–27 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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:

- The proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A* and A in GCSE examinations is too low, as are the proportions making good or better progress in English and, especially, mathematics.
- While the majority of teaching is good, there is little that is outstanding and too much that requires improvement. Teaching tasks are insufficiently varied and questioning is not always used effectively to check what students have learned. The quality of the marking of work is too variable.
- Too few students study GCSE courses in modern foreign languages, history and geography. There is extensive use of early entry for GCSE examinations and some students study too many subjects. These factors limit their achievement in subjects in which they are most capable and interested.
- There are weaknesses in the middle leadership of some subjects including design and technology, and in aspects of the school's work such as monitoring of the progress of students supported by school action.

The school has the following strengths:

- There has been a steady improvement in GCSE performance at grade C and above, with just under half of Year 11 leavers gaining five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics in 2013.
- Students are well behaved, friendly and articulate. They are keen to learn and have good skills of learning independently and in groups.
- The management of students' behaviour is a notable strength. There is little bullying and any which occurs is dealt with effectively.
- Data are used with increasing effectiveness to plan suitable lessons and to monitor students' progress.
- The governing body has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and increasingly challenges school leaders to rectify the latter.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 32 teachers teaching. Thirteen of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors reviewed documents, including those relating to students' attainment and progress, behaviour and safeguarding, and to teachers' performance.
- Meetings were held with staff, groups of students, members of the governing body and with a representative of the local authority.
- The views of 73 parents and carers submitted on the Parent View website, and of staff who completed a questionnaire, were analysed and taken into account. A small number of written communications from parents and carers were also considered.

Inspection team

Paul Sadler, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Richard Steward	Additional Inspector
Justine Hocking	Additional Inspector
Marian Marks	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average size secondary school.
- Education beyond the age of 16 is provided mainly by colleges in St Austell and Truro. St Austell College also provides courses for students in Years 10 and 11.
- The number of students supported through school action is above average, as is the proportion who are supported through school action plus or who have statements of special educational needs. Most of these students have moderate learning or behavioural difficulties.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for children in local authority care, students known to be eligible for free school meals and children of families in the armed services.
- The proportion of students who arrive at or leave the school other than at the usual times is well above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- In addition to the provision at St Austell College, the school places a small number of students at a short-stay school in order to support their emotional and behavioural needs.
- Since the previous inspection the senior leadership of the school has been restructured. This included the appointment of two new deputy headteachers in September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to be consistently at least good and thereby raise achievement, especially for more-able students, by:
 - ensuring that students are given a suitable range of interesting tasks that tap into their undoubted enthusiasm for learning, especially in mathematics
 - enabling all students to contribute when questioning them about what they have learned
 - ensuring that the recently introduced policy for marking work is used consistently by all teachers
 - ensuring that teachers when teaching outside their specialist area have the necessary training and support.
- Improve the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 by:
 - improving opportunities for students to study subjects such as modern foreign languages, history and geography
 - raising students' chances of gaining the highest grades at GCSE through greater consistency in the number and length of the courses they study and in the entry policy for examinations.
- Strengthen middle leadership in subjects and aspects of the school where weaknesses exist, including design and technology and the monitoring of students supported by school action.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, at the end of Year 11 is well below the national average, although there has been a steady improvement in this measure over the past three years.
- In 2012 the proportion of leavers not achieving at least five GCSE passes increased significantly as too many students did not complete their GCSE courses. There was some improvement in this measure in 2013.
- The proportions of students completing GCSE courses in some subjects including modern foreign languages, history and design and technology, are too low. For example, in 2013 only around one student in six completed a modern foreign language course and only half of these attained a good pass.
- In English, an average proportion of students make the progress expected of them although the proportion making good progress is below average. In 2012, progress in mathematics was poor. Progress in this subject is now much improved, although too few students exceed the minimum that is expected of them and so do not achieve the highest GCSE grades. This is because they have too few opportunities to apply the more complex principles such as circle theorem to real-life situations.
- In some subjects, including science and physical education (PE), students make good progress and achieve well. This is because they are given challenging, motivating tasks on courses of suitable length.
- Students start school in Year 7 with levels of literacy and numeracy that are well below average. Their achievement in these aspects, while remaining below average, improves steadily as they are encouraged to read widely and to apply what they have learned. While additional government funding intended to help students to catch up is used effectively, girls make better progress than boys in developing their literacy. School leaders demonstrate undoubted commitment to equality of opportunity, but this shows that these goals are as yet not fully realised.
- The many students who come to the school after the start of Year 7 make progress that is equal to that of other students.
- Students eligible for the pupil premium are making improving progress. Gaps in their performance in English and mathematics relative to other students in the school have been around the national average, which for example in 2013 was around one GCSE grade, but there is good evidence that by the summer of 2014 these gaps will have narrowed to a point where they have little significance.
- Students supported at school action plus or with statements of special educational needs make progress that is at least equal to that of other students, because their progress is monitored well and additional help is quickly made available. Monitoring of the progress of students supported by school action is less effective. There is insufficient monitoring of their progress and of whether their needs have been met, and hence the evidence of whether they make sufficient progress is insecure.
- The progress of students at alternative provision is monitored. They generally achieve well in relation to their starting points.
- Students collaborate well in lessons and also show good skills when working independently, such as in Year 7 mathematics when finding the range, mean, mode and frequency of a set of data. They also demonstrate good skills of listening and are articulate when speaking to adults.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Too much of the teaching has weaknesses which hamper students' progress. This is due to variation in quality, rather than any single endemic weakness. In a number of cases, teachers

are not applying potentially effective guidance from school leaders with sufficient rigour. In other examples, the weaknesses stem from teachers' lack of confidence when teaching outside their specialist field.

- In a number of examples, too many students did not have enough time to complete the task they had been given, such as with lower-attaining Year 9 students when practising their writing. This tended to happen when the teacher talked for too long. In other cases the teacher's explanation of the task lacked clarity. In an extreme example within the design and technology area, neither the teacher nor the Year 10 students seemed entirely sure of the examination for which they were being prepared.
- In mathematics, while students are taught more complex ideas they are not taught how these can be applied to real-life situations. This makes understanding more challenging for them.
- Questioning is used well by some teachers but too often it is directed at the most enthusiastic students, rather than to check the learning of the whole class.
- The recently introduced and potentially effective marking policy is not applied with equal rigour in all subjects, so while students get good guidance on how to improve their work in some such as science, in others, including mathematics, this is less often the case.
- The majority of teaching, however, is good and has improved since the previous inspection. In science, students respond well to challenging tasks such as in Year 10 when investigating the catalytic decomposition of hydrogen peroxide. In PE, Year 8 boys made excellent progress in developing dribbling skills in football, in part through very effective assessment of their partner's strengths and weaknesses.
- In this better teaching, teachers make good use of data to plan for each student's individual needs. Those who are disabled or with special educational needs are supported well, and teachers are also alert to the needs of those in receipt of the pupil premium. Students have challenging targets, with the exception of those capable of achieving the A* grade. They are aware of their own progress and of how it can be improved.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour is a strength of the school. They are polite, friendly and keen to learn, even when faced with indifferent teaching. They enjoy school life and were keen to give inspectors their intelligent and thoughtful opinions. This reflects the school's success in fostering positive relationships.
- Students say there is little bullying and the school's records confirm this. Since the introduction of effective new behaviour policies, the number of exclusions has declined rapidly, as has the use of less severe sanctions such as detentions.
- Students are aware of different forms of bullying and of how to minimise its impact. Racist or homophobic behaviour is not tolerated by staff or by students, reflecting the school's commitment to the elimination of discrimination.
- The high numbers of students who arrive after the start of Year 7 say they are made very welcome and settle quickly.
- Students are keen to help others. An example of this is that each year a range of activities organised by students is used to collect donations to a local, a national and an international charity. This is an example of the school's effective promotion of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Students are keen to take on responsibilities, such as by becoming prefects or by training primary school pupils in sport and PE.
- There are good systems in place for students to express their views. These are appreciated by students who say that adults listen to them and value their opinions.
- School leaders monitor the behaviour and safety of students at alternative provision, ensuring their welfare.
- Attendance is average and is slowly improving. Persistent absence is reducing. This occurs mainly in Year 11 and has contributed to weak GCSE outcomes for a small group of students.

Specific action has been taken to remedy this situation.

The leadership and management require improvement

- The organisation of the curriculum, especially in Years 10 and 11, is weak. For understandable reasons, a few years ago the school adopted a policy designed to maximise students' opportunities to gain qualifications. This, however, came at a cost as it reduced the chances of some, notably the more-able students, to attain the highest grades and a good portfolio of the subjects that give easy access to further and higher education.
- School leaders have recognised these shortcomings and have taken action to remedy them. However, these are only in place for the current Year 9 and will not have their full impact until the summer of 2016. In the meantime, many GCSEs and other examinations are taken in Year 10 or early in Year 11. Some students take on new courses in Year 11 and feel under pressure, as they do not have enough time to concentrate on the subjects in which they might perform best.
- Middle leadership has been strengthened considerably but there remain areas of weakness. In design and technology, there is a lack of clarity about the available courses and insufficient guidance for teachers on teaching the subjects, especially when teaching outside their specialist field. School action for students who require it is not sufficiently well targeted and monitored.
- School leaders are accurate in their assessment of teaching quality. They have been successful in virtually eliminating inadequate teaching, including by taking robust action. Performance management is not as yet fully effective in eliminating the remaining weaknesses in teaching, although systems are now in place to enable this to happen.
- There have been significant improvements in leadership and management since the previous inspection, and these are reflected in improving students' achievement. Senior leadership was strengthened in September 2013 and already data are being used much more effectively to monitor progress and inform teachers and governors about key trends. Evaluation is accurate and is used to establish appropriate priorities for the future.
- The leadership and management of behaviour and student welfare are a particular strength which is reflected in the school's success in this area.
- Those parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire support the school strongly. Communications with parents and carers are effective and opportunities are taken to maintain contact with those who might not routinely work in partnership with the school.
- The school works effectively with other education providers and external agencies. The local authority has provided a range of support which has been effective in improving achievement in English and mathematics, and in strengthening leadership and management.
- This is a school that has faced many challenges in the recent past. There has been improvement in teaching and in students' achievement since the previous inspection although not always at a fast enough rate. With the recent strengthening of senior leadership, the governing body and resulting improvements, the school demonstrates that it can further improve.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has a good range of expertise and community representation, including representatives from the primary and further education sectors. Governors have a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and provide effective challenge, for example on the quality of provision in design and technology. They use data with increasing effectiveness to monitor students' achievement. They have a good knowledge of how teachers' performance is managed and have supported action linking pay to performance. They understand how the pupil premium is used and monitor its impact effectively. Governors are well trained, for example all new governors go through a comprehensive induction. They meet their statutory responsibilities, for example to keep students safe.

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	112052
Local authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	426786

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	737
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Daphne Johns
Headteacher	Stephen Tong
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 September 2011
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