

Portland College

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates		19–21 March 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Students make good progress in developing the skills they need to become more independent and to achieve their long-term goals. These include developing confidence, independent living skills, managing their behaviour and gaining relevant qualifications.
- Lessons are good where students are engaged in meaningful, practical activities which teachers plan well to meet individual needs.
- Highly effective teamwork between specialist therapists, teachers and support staff help students to develop good communication skills, their ability to make choices and engage fully in their learning.
- Teachers and learning support assistants, supported by the recently appointed manager, provide very good support to students in managing their own behaviour.
- Leaders and managers, supported fully by the governors, have steered the college very well through a period of planned change and ensured that students continue to make good progress. Leaders are very focused on providing an extended range of learning opportunities for students.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Although teaching and learning is good overall, it is not outstanding.
- Managers and teachers have not consistently implemented the strategy for extending the development of students' literacy and numeracy functional skills across all provision.
- Students' targets are not consistently clear, specific and measurable across the provision to enable detailed and accurate recording of all skills and progress.
- The full implementation of a few recent management initiatives has not taken place, including the development of the range of work experience opportunities and the use of the electronic recording of progress to monitor students' targets and progress.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve all teaching and learning by sharing the good and better practice in the college and making sure that teachers plan all lessons effectively to provide meaningful, practical activities that engage and challenge students.
- Strengthen the implementation of the functional skills strategy to ensure students extend their English and mathematics skills across all subjects and courses.
- Managers should rigorously review the system for setting targets to ensure that they are clear, specific, individual to students' needs and measurable. Monitor and improve the consistency of all targets and ensure that recording of progress indicates clearly what students can do and what they need to work on.
- Continue to implement recent management initiatives to develop a good range of varied work experience and to ensure that the recording of progress electronically fully supports the monitoring and improvement of all students' targets and progress.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Students make good progress in developing the personal and social skills they need for their future lives. A significant strength is the emphasis teachers place on the development of students' communication skills so that they are able to exercise choice. In addition, they make good gains in their levels of confidence and independence, as well as the ability to manage their own behaviour.
- Throughout the college, students become adept at using voice output devices and tablet computers to aid communication. In one communication lesson, in the college's coffee shop, students demonstrated excellent skills development and an ability to express their choices and communicate more effectively with others.
- Students' achievement across an increased range of meaningful accredited qualifications is high, with the great majority reflecting their gains in personal and independent living, as well as in vocational skills. The achievement of a range of functional skills qualifications is also high.
- Students make good progress towards realising their planned learning goals. Targets cover all aspects of the students' programme, including independence, behavioural and communication goals. While many targets are suitably challenging and specific, others are too vague or too complex which hinders the consistent recording of their progress. Managers are aware that this remains an area for improvement.
- Managers and teachers effectively collate and review students' performance weekly using data from the recently introduced electronic records of progress at multidisciplinary meetings. Current information indicates no significant variation in achievement exists between different student groups in relation to disability, gender or ethnicity. The detail in the analysis and reporting on data about equalities is good.
- An increasing number of students attend internal and external work placements to improve their work-related skills by familiarising themselves with and learning to cope in different settings. Recently appointed managers are effectively extending the range of external work experience to meet individual students' needs.
- Students enjoy and fully engage in their learning and college life. A good proportion of students achieve their long-term goals and progress to their chosen destinations. Over the last three

years, many leavers have progressed to further education or training. During the same period, a few students gained paid or supported employment or voluntary work.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and ensure that students make good progress towards their learning goals. Specialist multi-disciplinary working to implement individual communication and behaviour strategies is very effective. The majority of teachers and support staff are highly skilled and enthusiastic, with high expectations of what students can achieve.
- Teachers plan most lessons carefully and are skilled in identifying and meeting the diverse needs of students. Most lessons proceed at a good pace and challenge students well. In the most effective lessons, teachers and learning support assistants work together effectively to enable students to participate fully in meaningful, practical learning activities. In the majority of lessons, teachers have high expectations of students and provide challenge. In a travel training lesson, the teacher ensured that students felt comfortable and confident to direct taxi drivers to respond to their needs by careful, but challenging, classroom preparation.
- Managers and staff are working well to extend the number of work opportunities available to students internally and externally. Three recently appointed full-time members of staff with responsibility for improving employment outcomes are working well in partnership with a range of organisations to develop a wide range of work experience opportunities. The number of students taking part in external work placements has increased markedly since the appointment of the new team. Good support for students while undertaking work experience is helping to ensure the success of this venture.
- Teachers and learning support assistants, supported by the recently appointed manager, provide very good support to students in managing their own behaviour. Staff are benefitting from behaviour management training, which with comprehensive behaviour support plans and the introduction of a self-reflective, post-incident log for students, is leading to a steady decline in incidents.
- Managers and staff have successful strategies for establishing students' starting points. On entry to college, an extended period of thorough assessment establishes a secure baseline from which to measure progress. Teachers provide effective feedback to students on their progress. Students review and extend their learning well in most lessons. In the better lessons, students evaluate each other's work, for example reviewing photographic evidence captured on a tablet computer. Managers and staff ensure parents and carers are well informed of students' progress.
- Although improved, the setting of targets and the quality of recording students' skills and progress varies. In the better instances, targets are clear, relevant and enable the measurement of progress to be detailed and accurate. Less successful targets are too broad and complex to enable detailed recording of progress.
- The very good multi-disciplinary support provides a wide range of assistance both in and out of the classroom. Thorough assessments of students' needs form the basis for clear and specific communication targets and individual programmes. Improvements to the provision of support, including closer working relationships between teachers and therapists, provide a more coherent development of students' skills. The use of signing, symbols, specialist software and, where appropriate, voice output devices supports students very well in lessons. A specialist counselling team, with experience of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, provides a good emotional support.
- Managers and staff have established a clear strategy to extend the development of functional skills throughout all provision. In the better lessons, the development of English and mathematics skills takes place through planned activities such as money management and

counting the number of laps run in a sports session. However, while a few well-planned functional skills opportunities occur in lessons, this is not a consistent feature.

- Regular visits from a careers consultant provide effective additional information and impartial support for students. Support for students, after leaving the college, has been strengthened by the appointment of a full-time manager with responsibility for ensuring leavers successfully achieve their long-term goals.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The flexibility of the range of subjects, of teaching styles and support to meet the needs of each student, ensure that all learning is inclusive. Students with profound communication difficulties convey their views very successfully. The college is characterised by an atmosphere of mutual respect between staff and students.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
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- Leaders and managers set a clear vision for the college, fully supported by governors. Strategic and business planning is very thorough highlighting the many changes since the last inspection. A better range of courses provide clear progression routes for students. The principal and senior managers have high expectations for students and they have worked relentlessly to ensure all staff share these expectations and provide good learning. The college is well resourced and managers have ambitious plans to improve the accommodation further and to develop new resources to extend vocational learning and independent living.
- Managers monitor the quality of provision effectively. All staff are involved in identifying and taking actions to ensure the achievement of the high standards. Course leaders systematically monitor the operational and strategic objectives of the college. A recently introduced course review system enables managers to gain a detailed understanding of the quality of provision each term. Governors are appropriately experienced and provide good support and challenge to leaders and managers through their full involvement in the college and quality improvement work.
- Leaders and managers give a high priority to improving teaching, learning and assessment. Formal observations are now unannounced and assist managers in gaining an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning across all provision. Inspectors' judgements on the quality of lessons broadly matched those of managers.
- The management of staff performance has improved and links closely to raising the standard of teaching, learning and assessment. Managers monitor all teachers well against key performance measures. Where they identify underperformance, managers provide good support to enable staff to reach the required high standards. Managers have introduced many new processes which have improved the performance of staff and extended opportunities for students.
- Staff training and development are good. Staff gain the qualifications and skills they need to ensure students benefit from their expertise and knowledge. Most staff are well qualified and receive continuing professional development so that they can better meet the needs of the changing cohort of students. Managers ensure staff are fully supported through a good range of both internal and external training. The good use of learning mentors provides extra support to teachers and helps to share good practice.
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of how to improve provision. Self-assessment is accurate and thorough. Revised procedures to monitor standards are assisting managers to evaluate provision rigorously. Managers have successfully identified and implemented actions to resolve most areas for improvement since the last inspection.
- Managers and staff collect students' feedback and use it effectively to improve provision. The student council meets regularly and managers are responsive to students' views and requests. For example, in response to students' feedback, managers and students developed a joint plan

with the local police on safe driving around the campus. While opportunities for work experience have increased, due to recent, increased staffing, managers recognise the need to continue this development.

- Managers and staff promote well and continuously evaluate and monitor equality and diversity. Leaders and governors review detailed data on achievement to ensure provision meets students' requirements across all levels of need, learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Managers and staff ensure students have appropriate aids and adaptations to promote access to learning to meet their needs. The use of assistive technology to support learning is good.
- Portland College meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding students. Managers and staff promote the well being and safety of students particularly effectively. Managers follow up effectively identified safeguarding issues, using clear procedures and guidelines. Students feel safe and are confident to talk to staff if they have any concerns. Managers and staff prioritise health and safety in lessons and they instruct students skilfully on how to keep safe within the college and wider community.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Portland College

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

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Independent living and leisure skills	2

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent specialist college							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 134							
	Part-time: N/A							
Principal/CEO	Mark Dale							
Date of previous inspection	September 2012							
Website address	www.portland.ac.uk							
Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	32	103	N/A	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Part-time	0	0	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Educational Funding Agency (EFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N/A. 							

Contextual information

Portland College is a charitable independent specialist college for students with autistic spectrum conditions and those with profound and multiple learning disabilities and/or difficulties. The college operates from a single campus near Mansfield, Nottinghamshire. The college enrolls students from a wide geographical area. Approximately one-third of all students are residential and the remainder attend the college on a day basis. Some 12% of the students are from minority ethnic groups. In 2010/11, Portland College took over the funding contract for Whitegates College, a local college for students with autistic spectrum disorders. The majority of Whitegates College students 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

Lead inspector

Margaret Hobson HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the assistant principal 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 online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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