

# Portfield School

Parley Lane, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 6BP

**Inspection dates** 6–7 May 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Portfield School has improved significantly since its last inspection.
- Leaders have made significant changes to the way support staff are deployed, which have brought about continuity of staffing and improved teaching. Teaching is consistently good across the school.
- Pupils' behaviour and safety are good. Pupils make good improvements in their personal and social development and learn to manage aspects of their autism more effectively. This has helped to improve their safety.
- The majority of pupils make good progress and some make outstanding progress from low starting points. Pupils make exceptional progress in developing their life skills.
- Senior leaders and governors have worked well together to improve the school, including the quality of teaching. They have raised expectations, and created an environment in which pupils feel safe, behave well and improve academically, socially and personally.
- A cultural change in the school has been achieved. Staff focus much more clearly on pupils' learning and on carefully checking their progress.
- Parents hold the school in high regard and staff are proud to be part of the school.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching to enable pupils to make outstanding progress over time.
- In lessons, staff do not always make clear to pupils what they are to learn.
- Occasionally, the pace of learning is too slow to sustain pupils' interest, limiting the progress they can make.
- Reading materials are not always age-appropriate for some older pupils.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 13 lessons or part-lessons. All lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors examined pupils' work across the school. They also listened to pupils read and looked at their reading records.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and senior leaders.
- Inspectors held a discussion with members of the governing body and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the charity, Autism Wessex, which owns the school.
- Informal discussions were held with pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed school documents including those relating to pupils' academic and social progress, school self-evaluation, the school development plan and safeguarding policies.
- Inspectors considered 24 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors looked at 43 Ofsted questionnaires returned by staff.

## Inspection team

Frank Price, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Joseph Skivington

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is part of Autism Wessex, a charity that runs a range of support, respite and residential services in Dorset and Hampshire.
- 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 the sixth form.
- The sixth form is based in a large house near the centre of Christchurch.
- There are currently a very small number of pupils under the age of 11. There are no children in the early years.
- All the pupils have statements of special educational needs. All have autism and have severe, profound, complex and moderate learning difficulties.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well below average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided for disadvantaged children who are looked after or known to be eligible for free school meals. In 2014, there were a very small number of disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 and in Year 11.
- The school does not receive primary sport funding or Year 7 catch-up funding.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

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

- Raise pupils' achievement still further by ensuring that:
  - more teaching is outstanding
  - staff make clear to pupils what they want them to learn in lessons
  - the pace of lessons is always suitable to keep pupils motivated so that more make outstanding progress
  - reading materials are always suitable for older pupils.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- Leadership and management at all levels are good. There has been a cultural change in the school, which has led to a sharper focus on learning. This is widely shared and understood by staff. For example, staff have developed core principles for teaching and learning, which has helped them to improve their practice. This has paid dividends in accelerating pupils' progress.
- School leaders have improved teaching by rigorously checking its quality and have succeeded in remedying weaknesses identified. Regular advice and coaching have contributed to improved teaching, with teachers having good opportunities to extend their knowledge through training and observing other teachers. Weak teaching has been addressed and there is a specific link between salary progression and good teaching.
- The school receives a small amount of funding for disadvantaged pupils, which is used effectively to provide additional therapies for pupils and to purchase extra equipment. This has enabled pupils to improve aspects of their communication and interaction with other people and to achieve as well as other pupils in the school.
- The school is wholeheartedly and successfully committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all its pupils. Pupils are treated with respect and dignity and as unique individuals. Rigorous checking of information about pupils' attainment ensures that if pupils are not progressing as expected, the reasons are identified and addressed quickly.
- The school is a happy and accepting community and this helps to ensure that discrimination in any form is not an issue. The diversity of staff and their backgrounds are celebrated and enrich the life of the school. Staff take pride in their membership of the school community, and the school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- Older pupils receive appropriate careers guidance and support to help them make choices for the future. They are well prepared for their life after school, particularly through the excellent 'life skills' programme.
- The courses and experiences offered to pupils meet their needs and interests well. The strong focus on learning for specific purposes and developing life skills and communication skills is a strength of the school.
- The school's self-evaluation paints a clear picture of strengths and further areas for improvement. Development planning is thorough and provides a good blueprint for future improvements. The school's capacity to improve is good as senior leaders and governors work together well and there is a clear sense of purpose and direction.
- The chief executive officer (CEO) of the charity which owns the school has ensured that it receives effective support. Enabling a staffing re-structure to take place and commissioning an external review of the school have brought about greater rigour and challenge.
- Safeguarding procedures are rigorous to ensure the safety and protection of pupils and meet government requirements.
- Parents hold the school in high regard and feel their children are well taught and looked after.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - An external review of the role of the governing body has helped to improve its effectiveness, including its ability to challenge school leaders. Governors have a better understanding of the work of the school and its strengths and areas for development. They contribute well to improvement planning and to the self-evaluation of the school.
  - Governors undertake regular visits to classrooms with members of the senior leadership team and these have a specific focus. They know that teaching is good and they have played their part in securing improvements.
  - Governors have a clear understanding of pupils' progress and ask relevant questions about the progress of different groups of pupils. This enables them to check that no group of pupils is underperforming. Governors have enough information to compare pupils' performance with similar pupils nationally. They hold leaders to account well.
  - Governors have implemented thorough procedures for assessing the headteacher's performance. They ensure that the links between pay increases for staff and the quality of teaching are robust. They are quickly informed when weaknesses in teaching are identified and about what is being done to address them.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils are good****Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Many pupils find it difficult to interact socially and are often reluctant to engage in social activities, due to their autism. However, over time, pupils' social development and behaviour improve well. Pupils become more tolerant of change and learn to relate to others in a more positive way. The school's records of pupils' behaviour show that, for many, aggression and other aspects of challenging behaviour reduce well over time.
- Pupils develop positive attitudes to learning, and increase their attention span. They learn to communicate more confidently with a wider range of people and in different situations, such as in the dining room, making choices of what they want for lunch.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted effectively. Pupils enjoy being part of the local community, enjoying, for example, visits to churches and trips to a science museum. Pupils learn to make choices and follow well-established routines.
- Staff encourage pupils to develop positive and trusting relationships, which increases their tolerance of change. Parents feel that their children's behaviour improves well. One parent commented, 'My son's progress at Portfield has been amazing. Portfield changed his world around.'
- Pupils' attendance is average. There have been no exclusions or bullying incidents in recent years.

**Safety**

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Most pupils find it difficult to express their feelings in words, but their demeanour and evident happiness at school indicate that pupils feel safe and secure.
- Photographs of visitors to school are distributed to classes so that pupils understand there are new people in the school, which helps to reduce their levels of anxiety.
- Pupils undergo thorough preparation for managing aspects of everyday life. They learn how to clean, Hoover and do other household chores in a flat. Pupils learn how to carry out tasks safely. The school strikes the right balance of managing risk and promoting pupils' independence.
- Safeguarding procedures are very thorough. Staff follow procedures based on up-to-date guidance and undertake relevant training.

**The quality of teaching is good**

- Teachers have a good knowledge of and expertise in autism. This enables them to meet pupils' complex learning needs well. Teachers' extensive knowledge of pupils and their understanding of how to overcome barriers to learning are used very effectively and contribute to pupils' good progress.
- Staff are very flexible in their work with pupils. For example, they give pupils 'sensory breaks' to help them engage in activities for longer periods of time, while having short bursts of focused learning.
- Staff are skilled and sensitive in managing pupils' behaviour, knowing when to give them time and space and when to re-focus them on tasks. This keeps disruptions to learning to a minimum.
- Signs, symbols and routines are used effectively to give pupils confidence and a sense of security so that they know what to expect, thus reducing their levels of anxiety.
- Teachers have developed a common agreement on the core principles of teaching across the school, which includes aspects such as motivation, understanding of pupils' needs, and the need for pupils to be safe and ready to learn. This shared understanding has helped to establish consistently good teaching.
- Mathematics is taught effectively. Teachers strongly emphasise the use of numeracy in real-life situations such as telling the time or handling money in shops. Pupils learn to recognise and match simple two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes.
- Staff's supportive, positive and well-structured approach promotes pupils' positive attitudes to learning in lessons, as well as creating enjoyable learning experiences. Experiences are often very practical and meaningful and succeed in preparing pupils effectively for life after school.
- Pupils have regular opportunities to read. The most-able pupils read relatively complex texts and learn to read aloud with expression. Other pupils learn to recognise symbols and use them more confidently to help with their communication. Sometimes reading materials used for some older pupils are not always suitable for their age.
- Occasionally, the pace of learning in lessons is too slow, leading to some pupils losing interest. This limits their progress.

- Overall, teaching has improved so that it is consistently good, but there is not enough sustained outstanding teaching to enable pupils to make excellent achievement.

### **The achievement of pupils** is good

- The majority of pupils make expected or better than expected progress. Pupils make good gains in developing their communication skills, which are often at an early developmental level, using symbols, signs or pictures to make their needs known.
- The school does not enter pupils early for public examinations.
- The school is careful to enable all pupils to achieve well. For example, the small number of girls make as much progress as boys.
- The very small number of disadvantaged pupils who qualify for additional funding make similar progress to their peers. Because of the low numbers, it is not possible to compare their attainment with that of pupils in other schools.
- Staff's thorough checking of pupils' progress enables pupils to make small but significant steps of progress. This includes pupils' development of confidence and ability to carry out tasks in different contexts.
- In mathematics, the most-able pupils work on the concept of mode, median and range. In English, they can write simple sentences and use a glossary. Less-able pupils respond to simple instructions, for example by giving named items on request or reading the days of the week.
- The majority of pupils are non-verbal, but they become more confident in using alternative methods of communication. Some pupils make good use of information and communication technology to help them to communicate.
- Pupils make good progress in their personal and social development. Parents comment on the improvement they have witnessed in their children's behaviour, sociability and their development of life skills such as dressing themselves.
- Pupils' progress is limited on the few occasions when teachers do not have clear expectations of what each pupil is to learn in lessons. When this is the case, pupils are not stretched sufficiently.

### **The sixth form provision** is good

- The sixth form provides a mature and distinctive setting, which prepares students very effectively for life after school. There is a strong emphasis on promoting students' independence and life skills. Students who move on to college after school receive good support to prepare them well to make smooth and successful transitions. Students undertake work experience in local hotels or businesses and for some this has led to extended voluntary work placements. Students achieve nationally accredited awards, which boost their self-confidence.
- Teaching is good. Teachers use a wide array of activities successfully to make learning meaningful for students. The proximity of the sixth form to the town centre creates plentiful opportunities for students to use community facilities to support their learning and develop life skills. Students who are more able shop for ingredients and prepare meals with minimal support. On rare occasions, when the pace of learning is not quick enough, students lose focus, which restricts their progress.
- Students are safe and feel safe. Their attitudes to learning are positive and many are keen to introduce themselves to visitors. Over time, they develop confidence and mature well. Relationships between staff and students are excellent and this helps to develop students' self-esteem effectively.
- The sixth form is well led and managed. Regular monitoring and training have ensured that teaching is at least good. Expectations of students are high with a clear focus on preparation for adulthood. Students' progress is checked closely. The expansion of work-related opportunities is an area for further development that has been clearly identified by the school.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	113942
<b>Local authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	462524

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	54
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	24
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Norma Baker
<b>Headteacher</b>	Tyler Collins
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	25–26 September 2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	01202 573808
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