

Portslade Aldridge Community Academy

Chalky Road, Portslade, Brighton, East Sussex BN41 2WS

Inspection dates

9–10 November 2016

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Many parents, rightly, describe how the principal has given the school a new lease of life. One wrote that she has done 'an amazing job at turning the school around with great leadership and strict rules'.
- The principal is very well supported by senior, faculty and pastoral leaders and other members of staff. Governors both oversee and contribute much to the school's growth.
- A record number of primary school parents and their children have chosen the school for 2017.
- The good sixth form is also increasingly popular, with work-related courses and academies for football, cricket, dance and digital media. Sixth-form students are taught well and mature into young adults with strong career aspirations and confidence.
- A recently introduced personal health and education (PSHE) programme has many strong features but has not been in place long enough to fully develop pupils' already good, spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development.
- Although differences have diminished, disadvantaged pupils as a group do not do as well as other pupils nationally. The most able pupils do not all achieve as well as they could.
- With more specialist teachers, teaching, learning and assessment have all improved. Pupils are well motivated to learn and achieve as well as they can. They work hard in lessons and collaborate well.
- Particularly effective elements of teaching include probing questioning, a focus on subject-specific vocabulary, work that matches pupils' abilities and helpful feedback on the quality of pupils' work.
- The next challenge for school leaders is to spread the excellent teaching practice that exists to build on the improved GCSE and sixth-form results in 2016.
- Thorough safeguarding procedures and high-quality care and guidance for pupils mean that they feel safe, are happy and make good progress.
- Practically every member of staff who completed a questionnaire feels that the school's culture encourages calm and orderly conduct and high aspirations. Pupils' behaviour is extremely good, both in and out of lessons.
- Leaders have tackled the issue of poor attendance but have still to reduce the small number of pupils and students who do not attend regularly.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement by:
 - intensifying, in all years, leaders' and teachers' focus on improving disadvantaged pupils' progress
 - challenging the most able pupils and students across the school to aim for the highest standards, including the most able disadvantaged
 - further spreading the excellent teaching practice that exists, for example in preparing work that matches different groups of pupils' starting points
 - persevering with actions to maintain at least average attendance, and to reduce the proportion of pupils and students who are frequently absent.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal has tackled the school's weaknesses firmly and decisively since her appointment in September 2015. As well as issues raised in the previous inspection, she identified others that required rapid attention, particularly the high rate of absence and exclusions. Both of these reduced last year. One parent described the principal as 'brilliant for the school'.
- The importance of pupils having high aspirations and the confidence to achieve them now permeates the school's culture, from the leaders to Year 7 pupils.
- The school's sponsors and staff see their role within the community as a vital part of their work and encourage pupils to do the same. Their success was acknowledged by receiving the Youth in Action 'Community of the Year Award' in 2016.
- The Aldridge Foundation's list of the qualities it seeks to promote includes pupils having a 'social conscience'. The school has effective strategies to meet this aim. For example, news items, displayed on television screens, are often discussed in morning tutor sessions. The USA presidential election during the inspection was explored well and the school ran a mock Brexit vote earlier in the term.
- British values are strongly promoted through posters and PSHE lessons, but only the Year 11 pupils met during the inspection could articulate what these mean to them. In their own words though, younger pupils made it clear that respect for people's differences underpins the school's ethos.
- A Year 9 tutor session on Remembrance Day confirmed the school's development of strong moral and social values. Pupils say that they find the recently introduced PSHE programme interesting. It is well planned to strengthen pupils' awareness of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues, but has not been in place long enough to evaluate its impact on pupils' understanding.
- Staff morale is high at all levels. Faculty leaders are experienced and competent, and members of the senior leadership team work well together and with staff. There was little professional development for staff in the past but they now have many opportunities to extend and reflect on their practice. They carry out research and learn from and share ideas with colleagues within and beyond the school. Staff see appraisal of their work as fair and supportive.
- A beacon of excellence for almost three decades has been the leadership of the creative faculty, particularly for art and photography. Sixth-form and GCSE results in these subjects have been consistently high. In many years pupils have attained well above average grades. It is not surprising that the school has dedicated an impressive new gallery to the faculty leader.
- In the creative faculty, with only one music teacher and GCSE lessons taking place after school, there are very few extra-curricular groups and only a small number of pupils play instruments. Supported by the school's sponsor, plans are in place to develop provision for music in the future. Few pupils make good progress in Spanish and the numbers taking French or Spanish subjects for GCSE are low.

- In other areas, the curriculum has improved, especially provision for learning about cooking and healthy eating, religious education and PSHE. The science curriculum has been strengthened, with biology, chemistry and physics now taught separately by specialists.
- A parent rightly observed that 'After-school and breaktime clubs are plentiful, relevant and enjoyable.' Clubs to broaden pupils' horizons include science, technology, engineering and mathematics activities, astronomy and story making with writers. In addition, one afternoon a fortnight pupils choose an enrichment activity from a broad list of options.
- The allocation of government funds for disadvantaged and catch-up pupils is considered wisely and spent effectively. Outcomes for both improved last year. At the end of each year, leaders identify spending that clearly contributed to better learning and progress. Funding external expertise to raise some pupils' self-esteem and appreciation of the value of education continues because it helped a number of pupils. Special educational needs funds are also spent thoughtfully and effectively.
- The principal carried out an interesting survey to explore the experience of pupils in Years 7 to 9 and their reading habits. The findings contributed to positive actions to improve their literacy, but also to others to widen their horizons and develop their resilience to cope with issues they will face in their lives. A walk in the South Downs and a camping trip, which some pupils had never done before, were very successful.
- Contact with parents has a high profile with many of their written comments referring to how quickly their concerns are dealt with or how their children's anxieties about secondary school 'melted away'. Indeed, staff could not do more to make pupils' transition from primary school happy, with a summer school, visits and lessons in advance, and activities to help pupils get to know each other.
- Two primary headteachers spoke to an inspector to describe the mutual benefits from the improved, well-established links. During the inspection, Year 13 sports students were preparing an orienteering lesson which 60 primary children were to attend later in the term.
- A critical comment made by several parents was that they are unsure about the progress their children make and find some of the school's online sites tricky to negotiate. Senior leaders responded to feedback and acknowledge that the style of reports is due for review. A few other parents were unhappy about rapid staff turnover, or too much attention to the uniform. Staff turnover is no longer an issue and most pupils are proud to wear the uniform correctly.
- A Year 11 pupil observed correctly that 'The school has improved massively.' However, governors and senior leaders know that the developments they have instigated have yet to generate full consistency in their desired outcomes for every pupil to succeed in their academic and personal development.

Governance

- Members of the small and effective governing body bring a wealth of relevant experience and expertise in education to their deliberations. They observed that 'the principal is bringing pupils and the community with her' and feel this underpins parents' changed perception of the school. More parents have put the school down as their first choice for September 2017.
- Governors are fully aware of issues such as the viability of small groups in the sixth form, the need to reduce intervention in Year 11 and their role in overseeing how additional funds are spent. They know that differences between disadvantaged pupils and others have not fully diminished. Governors fully support the principal's evaluation of the staff's work.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. With a background in social service work, the chair of the governing body keeps a sharp eye on adherence to procedures and regulations. Training for staff is thorough, regular and fully up to date with the latest guidance, for example on whistle-blowing or when particular concerns should be reported directly to the police.
- All the pupils and students spoken to during the inspection reported feeling very safe. Staff make a point of stressing how careful pupils must be if they use social media sites and mobile phones. Staff are vigilant at identifying vulnerable pupils and contacting relevant support agencies if necessary.
- Over 90% of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, feel their children are safe and well looked after, as do 99% of staff in their questionnaire.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has moved into a higher gear this year with all teachers alert to leaders' high expectations. These include all pupils making at least good progress and those who need to catch up being supported to do so. Teachers' uniform planning ensures that pupils get down to work smartly and always know what they are going to learn.
- Teachers assess the quality of pupils' work accurately using a range of short and more formal tests. Information about pupils' progress is collected and analysed so that faculty leaders can identify groups that may not be keeping up with others.
- Staff know who the disadvantaged and the most able pupils are in their classes. Many teachers pose questions which match pupils' learning needs at the same time as challenging their thinking. For the most able, for example, teachers often insist on justification for an answer or, for a low-attaining disadvantaged pupil, ask them to explain a response in more detail. This effective practice is increasing but not yet evident consistently.
- Teachers make effective use of information about pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities, checking their progress to adjust their future work. Learning support assistants provide valuable additional support and know when to intervene, or step back if pupils are working confidently.

- Increasingly, pupils are tackling work at a level that challenges them. This has addressed an issue identified in the previous report. Another one related to the quality of teachers' feedback. Although not yet consistent in all subjects, teachers' feedback, following the school's policy, is often specific and relevant, and many pupils respond accordingly.
- A striking feature in many subjects is the constant focus on exploring subject-specific vocabulary and stressing the importance of using it in written work. If a word is hard to pronounce or spell, pupils may practise saying it out loud to fix it in their minds. Pupils often read out instructions or work they have completed, reinforcing their literacy skills.
- The mathematics department shares its style of working with other subjects so pupils know that, in science and geography for example, graphs must have scales and titles. A common feature of mathematics lessons is that teachers check understanding regularly to move pupils on to work at greater depth or provide extra help in a timely manner.
- Liaison with primary schools means that Year 7 pupils rarely repeat work they have done before. Teachers observe primary school pupils' lessons and work to appreciate how they learn best and to be aware of their starting points.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Parents of pupils who have special educational needs described the support their children receive as 'absolutely fantastic', commenting on the 'outstanding input in the first term' or 'expert knowledge and guidance received'.
- The principal's survey of Years 7 to 9 pupils revealed that one in five of them did not have a computer at home and had not been to London, and a few had not been to Brighton. The principal resolved to broaden their horizons through PSHE lessons, stimulating assemblies, external speakers and trips. During the inspection, a group of the most able pupils from several years visited the Houses of Parliament.
- Pupils are confident that they know a member of staff they would go to with any problems. All the groups of pupils met during the inspection were adamant that bullying hardly happens at all and that the school has a comprehensive, anti-cyber bullying programme.
- An increasing number of Year 11 pupils stay on into the sixth form with the majority of their peers going to other further education providers. A few move into employment combined with training. In previous years, the proportion of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, not in education, employment or training has been much lower than that seen nationally.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Inspectors saw nothing but sensible behaviour around the school's buildings and grounds, with no litter or graffiti at all. Pupils are welcoming and polite to visitors and very proud to attend the school.

- In many lessons, pupils' concentration is exemplary and they respond thoughtfully to teachers' guidance and each other's comments. A parent wrote that 'The discipline of the school has improved fantastically.'
- There are numerous ways for pupils to develop leadership skills, from being a school council member to a digital leader, a reading buddy or a charity supporter. A large number of pupils take up these responsibilities enthusiastically. Pupils are confident that the school council does share their views with leaders.
- Leaders take wide-ranging action, including organising visiting speakers, to promote pupils' empathy for those less fortunate than themselves and explore issues that may impact on their lives. Examples include refugee week, mental health awareness, local council projects or volunteering in a local care home.
- In the past, a well above average proportion of pupils were excluded for a fixed term. With clear expectations, and teachers sticking firmly to the school's behaviour policy, there were far fewer exclusions last year and the number continues to fall.
- Attendance improved dramatically in 2016, so much so that it accelerated faster than in any other school in the local authority. However, the overall attendance figure shows that a number of pupils, mostly the disadvantaged, did not attend regularly, with still some frequent absence.
- Paying for a minibus to fetch disadvantaged pupils with poor attendance in the morning continues because it was effective last year. It contributed to a reduction in the gap between the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and others. Nevertheless, leaders intend to persevere and work with parents until all pupils attend regularly.
- The very small number of pupils attending off-site provision improve their behaviour and attitudes to learning at the same time as studying school subjects alongside life skills. Staff are in close contact with the provider.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In 2015, pupils' progress overall and in key subjects matched or exceeded that seen nationally. Provisional GCSE results for 2016 indicate that pupils' progress continued to improve. In all years, current pupils are making typically good progress.
- Early indications are that the percentage of pupils attaining good results in both English and mathematics dropped a little in 2016 because the pupils in Year 11 had entered the school with lower prior attainment than in 2015. Those with average or lower starting points on entry had in fact made strong progress in these subjects. English and mathematics staff are rightly proud that many pupils achieved a grade or two higher than predicted by their starting points.
- In 2015 and 2016, pupils, including the most able (a small number of whom were disadvantaged), achieved above-average grades in subjects including information technology, sports studies, drama, music, art, photography and French. More pupils took GCSE geography and history and results remained strong.
- In 2016, practically all the most able pupils did well in science and this year they are making good progress studying the three separate sciences. As well, more pupils are

following science courses contributing to the English Baccalaureate qualification.

- With only a small number of pupils in each year, outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities fluctuate depending on their individual learning needs. Their progress overall improved in 2016.
- The effective use of extra funds for disadvantaged pupils in 2015/16 is particularly clear in the very small differences in progress between current disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils in Years 8 and 9. Intensive, regular, one-to-one sessions have made a real difference for many pupils in all years.
- Although improving, overcoming relatively weak previous learning in the past at key stage 4 by disadvantaged or the most able pupils has been more challenging. In 2015, the most able pupils, including a few who were disadvantaged, did not make good progress. Provisional progress measures show that they did better in 2016, but that there is more to do.
- In the principal's survey of Years 7 to 9 pupils, it emerged that the majority of them enjoy reading but do not read every day. All pupils now read for 20 minutes every day, and intensive sessions and online courses for those with low reading ages are beginning to make a significant difference. These are funded by catch-up and disadvantaged additional income.
- Improved careers advice and guidance mean that Year 11 pupils consider their future options wisely, realising that these will impact on their post-18 futures. As part of their transition, all Year 7 pupils joined parents and those from other years at an award ceremony held at Sussex University. These pupils, even those in Year 7, could therefore start to reflect on what they could aim for.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- 2016 outcomes were better than those in 2015. With very effective leadership, current students make securely good progress overall. Less successful subjects have been dropped so the curriculum now has a good blend of A-level and work-related options. Popular courses include digital media, information technology, sports and business diplomas, and A-level mathematics and art.
- In 2016, 100% pass grades were achieved in all bar one of the 21 work-related and academic subjects. In only a few subjects, such as A-level mathematics or some work-related business courses, did some of the most able or disadvantaged students not achieve the grades to match their abilities.
- Since September 2015, students are expected to attend all morning and work in supervised study sessions when they have no lessons. Despite a few moans, particularly from Year 13 students, this certainly contributed to an improved work ethic and the better results.
- A feature of many sixth-form lessons is how well students work together, discuss ideas and improve each other's ideas and contributions to discussions. Teaching is delivered by enthusiastic specialists who know how to generate students' enjoyment of their subjects. Many spot misconceptions quickly and use past examination papers to build students' confidence. As in Years 7 to 11, teachers often consider the meaning of subject-specific vocabulary, carefully plan work to match students' abilities and give

students time to reflect on the written feedback they receive.

- All students participate in work experience. Several of them help younger pupils in lessons, hear them read or offer practical computer support, for example. Students in the digital media academy work with one of the numerous companies supporting this exciting course (worth three A levels). Others, often studying work-related qualifications, participate in many hours of training with the football, cricket or dance academies. At the same time, they also learn about related career options, such as physiotherapy, refereeing or sports management.
- Students are encouraged to have entrepreneurial ideas and be imaginative about their futures. All the academies have strong links with employers and many of the teachers have worked in related industries.
- Students hear a good number of external speakers on a wide range of topics including self-defence. Some sixth formers would like their tutor sessions to include more information about personal health and safety, or topical issues such as radicalisation. They mentioned posters about British values but did not know what they were about.
- Sixth-form attendance has improved but a small number of students, particularly boys, miss too many lessons to make the progress they should from their starting points.
- Retention between Years 12 and 13 has increased from just over 70% in 2014 to over 90% this year. Students no longer pursue courses that do not match their abilities and aspirations. They have a 'probation' period in the first few weeks in Year 12. This is to be sure that they have made the right choice of academic, work-related or combined subjects, and have considered how these support their likely post-16 options.
- Each year, between 30 and 40 students retake GCSE in English or mathematics or both. They received intensive sessions in 2016 and the percentage passing these subjects increased significantly in English and went up a little in mathematics. All made good progress and achieved grades higher than predicted by those they attained at the end of Year 11.
- Externally checked information on what 2016 students did after they left the school was not available during the inspection. School information shows that the proportion of students not in education, employment or training declined in 2016. They received good advice and support for their career and higher education options. A few digital media students are likely to be employed by local companies full time or during university holidays.
- Sixth-form study programmes are very well organised and teaching has certainly improved in the last two years. However, overall provision will not be of the highest standard until all students attend well and feel more confident about their personal development for their future lives, and all subjects achieve results as good as the best.

School details

Unique reference number	137063
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	10019909

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	584
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	112
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rosalind Turner
Principal	Katie Scott
Telephone number	01273 416 300
Website	www.paca.uk.com
Email address	principal@paca.uk.com
Date of previous inspection	13–14 November 2014

Information about this school

- The school is sponsored by the Aldridge Foundation, an educational charity founded by Sir Rod Aldridge OBE in 2006 that, principally through the sponsorship of entrepreneurial schools and colleges, helps young people reach their potential and improve their communities. The school is co-sponsored by the Brighton and Hove City Council.
- The Foundation sponsors eight entrepreneurial schools and academies in England and is also a lead partner in the University Technical Colleges, one – UTC@harbourside – being close in Newhaven, East Sussex.

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school with a small sixth form.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is average.
- About 20 pupils in Year 7 are eligible for catch-up funding (for those who did not attain level 4 in English or mathematics at the end of primary school).
- A very small number of pupils in Years 9 and 10 attend part-time, off-site educational provision at Brighton and Hove Pupil Referral Unit.
- In 2015, the school met the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- About nine out of 10 pupils are of White British backgrounds and only a very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish as greater detail is required to support its public sector equality duty.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in close to 40 part-lessons, and supervised study sessions in the sixth form. Several of the lessons were joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at pupils' books in lessons and heard some pupils reading.
- Inspectors attended two assemblies, tutor times and a session related to pupils' welfare delivered by an external speaker. They met pupils and students informally as they visited parts of the school during breaktimes. They also held meetings with groups of pupils from several years and the sixth form, the most able, disadvantaged pupils, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Discussions were held with staff, including senior and middle leaders. The lead inspector met with the sponsor's chief executive officer and education director, the chair of the governing body and three other governors, and two headteachers from the Portslade Primary cluster.
- In addition to over 50 written comments from parents, inspectors took account of 85 responses to Parent View and 66 questionnaires completed by staff. No pupils completed the online questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included leaders' evaluations of the school's performance in 2016 and present standards and progress information, behaviour and attendance records and a selection of policies.

Inspection team

Clare Gillies, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Hunt	Ofsted Inspector
Jon Whitcombe	Ofsted Inspector

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