

# The Polygon School

Handel Terrace, Southampton, Hampshire SO15 2FH

## Inspection dates

8–9 December 2016

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Pupils develop strong positive relationships with staff. Over time, pupils become more confident and have greater self-esteem. As a result, they re-engage in learning.
- Leaders acted decisively to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Leaders and those responsible for governance have had a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. The school continues to improve.
- The curriculum has been carefully designed to take into account pupils' needs and interests. It has a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Those pupils who attend the engagement centre have an individual curriculum carefully tailored to their needs and future aspirations.
- Parents are very supportive of the school. They say that the school has 'made the world of difference' to their children.
- Systems for collecting and analysing information about pupils' next steps in learning are well used. Teaching is effective because it firstly addresses where pupils have gaps in their learning. It then helps pupils to rapidly gain new knowledge.
- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development is good. Pupils behave well because they are well supported both emotionally and academically.
- Governors challenge senior leaders effectively. They provide good strategic leadership.
- While levels of overall attendance have improved, the attendance of a few pupils remains too low.
- Those who are middle leaders do not consider the progress and attainment of different groups of pupils when monitoring pupils' work.

## **Full report**

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

- Improve attendance levels for the minority of pupils whose attendance is not as good as it should be.
- Improve the impact of middle leaders by ensuring that checks of pupils' work focus on the progress and attainment of different groups of pupils.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The headteacher and senior leaders have a clear vision to improve the personal development and academic progress of all pupils. They are determined to ensure that the school continues to improve. All staff work well together to make sure that pupils are well supported and are provided with a good quality of education.
- Parents are pleased with the school. 'Polygon has done my child the world of good, they are now happier and much more independent,' is typical of the comments made by parents. They praise the way that staff care about their children and respond quickly to any concerns.
- Many pupils enter the school at various times throughout the school year. Often, they arrive with little confidence in their abilities. Staff ensure that no time is lost in building positive relationships with pupils. They quickly help to remove any barriers to learning. Pupils are positive about the school and say that staff 'work hard to help us succeed'.
- The curriculum motivates and challenges pupils. It has been designed to give pupils lots of varied opportunities and prepares them well for life in modern Britain. Pupils quickly discover their own personal strengths and this helps them to make good progress. Pupils benefit from numerous trips and visits and these make an effective contribution towards their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, pupils visited Reykjavik in the summer for a geography field trip. Many pupils said that it was interesting to discover that daylight hours in the summer are much longer in Iceland. They said how much they had learned from visiting another country. The school encourages an appreciation of the arts, and pupils have been successful in achieving nationally recognised awards for their film about a geothermal plant. The school makes effective use of the links it has with local universities. Students regularly visit to support pupils in classes and help them to develop their interests.
- The school aims to recognise the potential and raise the aspirations of all pupils. Those who are most able, including those who are most able and disadvantaged, are given exciting opportunities to develop their skills. For example, those with stronger skills in English have benefited from visiting the battlefields in France where they recited poetry from the first world war. Pupils said that they had found it a very moving experience and that they now understand why the poems were written. Those with stronger skills in sport are encouraged to take part in a large range of additional physical activities. This enables them to make an informed choice about the sports they want to continue in the future.
- Pupils who attend the engagement centre are provided with a tailored curriculum that aims to motivate and develop life skills. Those pupils who go fishing have gained a greater understanding of the weather, geography and different fishing techniques. Some pupils have been successful in gaining nationally recognised awards.
- The school provides a large range of extra-curricular activities that broaden pupils' interests. For example, pupils can develop their skills in cookery, music, Spanish and chess. Football skills are well developed through links with a local football club. Visits to leisure centres, universities and adventure centres enable the school to offer a broad range of extra-curricular sports.

- The school uses all additional funding well. The school has clearly demonstrated the positive impact of pupil premium funding on improving disadvantaged pupils' outcomes. Year 7 catch-up funding is equally well used.
- Careers guidance is extensive. There are regular visits by a careers adviser who visits pupils from Year 8 onwards. This enables pupils to start to consider the different pathways available to them. Pupils are regularly given mock interviews and the effective feedback enables them to improve their skills continually. Pupils experience a range of different work experience placements in construction, offices, shops and factories. Pupils have regular visits to colleges for taster days. For example, some have recently visited a local college's marine engineering department.
- Those who are middle leaders have quickly developed their roles. However, when checking pupils' work, they do not focus sufficiently on the progress and attainment of all groups of pupils.

### **Governance of the school**

- Governors know the school well. They acted quickly to support the school while it was improving to good.
- The governing body is highly experienced and includes a wide range of specialists, including those working in education. Consequently, they are able to support and challenge leaders effectively.
- Governors have a good knowledge about all aspects of the school, including the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Records of meetings show that they have a clear strategic vision for moving the school forward.
- The governing body regularly reviews policies, particularly regarding the safeguarding of pupils. They make sure that all policies are up to date and meet legal requirements.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's priority is to make sure that all pupils are safe. Procedures are robust and staff are ever vigilant. The school thoroughly checks the suitability of staff and visitors to work with pupils. Appropriate action is taken to reduce risks.
- Pupils say that they feel safe at this school because teachers understand their needs. A particular strength is the way that the school works with a range of external agencies and therapists to ensure that pupils are well supported and that their concerns are listened to.
- The school works well with parents, who are very positive about the impact that the school has had on their children.
- Staff have followed an extensive programme of training to ensure that they are thoroughly up to date with the latest guidance.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- Teaching is good because staff help pupils to re-engage with their learning. Positive relationships rapidly develop. Pupils say that the staff at this school really care about them.
- When pupils join the school, there is a careful assessment made of their personal and academic needs. Teachers accurately identify where there are gaps in learning. They then plan work that rapidly addresses these gaps and helps pupils to move on rapidly

in their learning.

- There is a regular assessment of how much progress each pupil has made. Any pupil who is not making effective progress is given additional help to achieve.
- Those pupils in the engagement centre, who find learning more difficult, have benefited from following a nationally recognised award scheme that regularly checks their progress. Some pupils have demonstrated very strong progress because staff know where each pupil is in their learning and provide work that meets their needs.
- Staff quickly identify those pupils who are the most able in a subject or activity. The use of university students, who provide individual help in lessons, provides most-able pupils with aspirational role models for the future.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- When pupils first arrive at the school, attitudes to learning are often negative. However, pupils quickly develop more positive attitudes because they trust the staff, who encourage them to believe in themselves. Parents say that their children's self-esteem and confidence has really improved since they started at the school.
- Inspectors observed positive relationships throughout the school. Pupils treat each other with respect and listen to what others have to say. Lunchtimes are orderly and pupils sit respectfully and say their prayers before the food is served. The use of derogatory or aggressive language is rare. When it does occur, it is usually other pupils who tell a pupil that inappropriate language is not tolerated in this school.
- Pupils have numerous opportunities to take responsibility. For example, they operate equipment during school assemblies. Pupils feel that their views are valued and acted on. They enjoy contributing to the school council.
- Teachers recognise that for many pupils any type of change can cause considerable distress. To ensure that pupils feel secure, they provide dedicated support to make certain they feel confident when they go on trips, especially to other countries. In school, staff have high expectations and frequently encourage pupils to 'have a go' at trying out new activities. This helps pupils to become successful learners.
- The school makes good use of the local area to give pupils an awareness of the natural world. Many pupils said how much they enjoyed being outside, whether in forest school or on the school's allotment. Pupils gain a good understanding of the needs of animals. For example, the school's chickens are gently cared for.
- Around the school, inspirational displays encourage pupils to 'reach for the stars'. In lessons, pupils are regularly encouraged to think about their future plans and how they are going to achieve them.
- Pupils know how to stay safe both in and out of school. They recognise that they have to be aware of potential dangers when using the internet. Pupils report that bullying is rare. They say that if they encountered bullying they would immediately tell a member of staff, who would quickly deal with any concerns.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Although there are some incidents of very challenging behaviour when pupils first arrive, records show that these diminish the longer the pupil is at the school. Over time, the number of exclusions has also declined. This demonstrates that staff are highly effective at managing pupils' behaviour.
- Prior to joining this school, many pupils had either been out of education or had very poor attendance records. At this school, due to numerous effective strategies, pupil attendance is rapidly improving. This academic year attendance is at 90%, which is just a little lower than the national average. However, there are still a few pupils for whom attendance is still too low.
- The alternative provision is effective at supporting pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. There is effective communication between the alternative provision and the school. Vocational pathways are agreed and plans are regularly monitored.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Often, pupils arrive at the school with low starting points when compared to others of the same age. Pupils make good progress because teachers and other staff give pupils the self-belief to succeed.
- Those pupils who have specific difficulties in speech and language communication are given regular support from well-trained staff, including speech therapists. The impact has been that pupils have made good progress in their communication skills. Many of those who have been at the school for some time are able to communicate clearly.
- Therapeutic support has successfully enhanced pupils' well-being and progress in their personal development. Pupils are helped to understand and overcome their specific barriers to learning.
- The school ensures that as many pupils as possible achieve qualifications that challenge them at the right level. Pupils are well prepared to continue into further education or employment. Consequently, the percentage of pupils who are not in education, employment or training after leaving this school is below the national average.
- In all year groups, pupils make good progress from their starting points. Almost all pupils who left key stage 4 last year attained qualifications ranging from entry level to GCSEs.
- Pupils make effective progress in English. Many read well. Those who find reading more challenging are given effective support by staff and reading volunteers. Most pupils make good progress in their writing. Good use is made of the Year 7 catch-up funding to develop pupils' reading and writing skills. Older pupils develop effective skills of drafting and editing their work. Last year all those who took a GCSE in English language successfully achieved an A\* to G grade.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics. They are given numerous opportunities to develop their understanding of the use of mathematics in everyday life. For example, pupils had to plan a trip to London and make decisions about what activities they could do with a set amount of money. All who were entered for a GCSE in mathematics in

2016 successfully achieved an A\* to G grade.

- Pupils do well in sport. Pupils' skills in both team and individual sports have rapidly improved since they have joined the school. Many pupils said that the wide range of sports on offer was one of the first things that they liked about the school.
- The most able pupils make good progress. This is because in addition to targeted support from staff, pupils also regularly receive individual support from university undergraduates. Students often work individually with pupils to help them develop skills across a range of subjects including mathematics, history, science, art and design.
- Most pupils in the school are disadvantaged. The school makes good use of the pupil premium funding to enable pupils to make strong progress across a range of subjects. For example, particularly strong progress was made last year in reading when some pupils made nearly two years of progress in four months.

## School details

Unique reference number	116624
Local authority	Southampton
Inspection number	10019878

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	55
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sarah Steege
Headteacher	Anne Hendon-John
Telephone number	02380 636 776
Website	<a href="http://www.polygon.southampton.sch.uk">http://www.polygon.southampton.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:info@polygon.southampton.sch.uk">info@polygon.southampton.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	24–25 September 2014

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The Polygon School provides education for 55 pupils aged 11 to 16. Class sizes are small and typically range from between two and eight pupils. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. All pupils have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Some pupils have neuro-developmental disorders, such as autism. Other pupils have behavioural disorders including attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. In addition to these difficulties, some pupils have needs related to speech, language and communication. Many pupils have previously been excluded from school or have been at risk of permanent exclusion.
- Pupils' attainment is typically well below their chronological age.



- A high proportion of pupils enter the school at different times throughout the school year and into all year groups.
- The school aims to 'provide an environment where children will feel happy, supported and empowered to make good life choices and where everyone feels a sense of belonging to the school community'.
- The school is located on two sites. There is a main school and an engagement centre called Morris House. The main school has specialist classrooms for art, cookery, science and design technology. Pupils at Morris House make use of the main school's specialist facilities.
- Morris House is a large building situated opposite the main school. It caters for those pupils who have more severe, complex and persistent disorders. Often, these pupils require the specialised multi-disciplinary teams within Tier 3 and 4 of the child and adolescent mental health services. For these pupils, the school aims to 'provide nurture and increase their engagement and attendance'. Since the previous inspection, the school has expanded the use of the engagement centre. Currently, there are 10 pupils who attend Morris House. All pupils in the school make use of the specialist therapies offered at Morris House.
- The school provides a range of therapies, including counselling, play therapy, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and complementary therapies.
- The school is part of Southampton Co-operative Learning Trust, which is a cooperative partnership between seven schools in the Southampton area. Five of the schools are primary and two are secondary schools. One of the secondary schools is mainstream and the other is Polygon School.
- Nearly all the pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding. The large majority of Year 7 pupils are eligible for catch-up funding.
- Four pupils are in the care of the local authorities.
- The school runs a breakfast and after-school club.
- The school has received notable success in local and national competitions associated with art, sports and gardening.
- The school uses one alternative provision, at City College in Southampton.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning across the school. There were 12 lessons and part lessons visited, many of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings and informal discussions were held with pupils to ascertain their views on what it was like to be a pupil at this school.
- Meetings were held with governors. There were discussions with the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 24 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire and also spoke on the telephone to parents at the end of the school day.
- The views expressed by 12 members of staff through the online questionnaires were considered.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation and policies. Information about pupils' current progress and targets was examined. Documents checking the quality of teaching and learning and records relating to behaviour, attendance, child protection and safeguarding were also considered.

## Inspection team

Liz Bowes, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Andrew Penman

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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