

Portland Primary School

Laird Street, Claughton, Birkenhead, Merseyside CH41 0AB

Inspection dates

22–23 November 2016

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders and governors have been too slow to halt a decline in the quality of education since the previous inspection.
- Too many weaknesses are holding the school back from providing an adequate education for its pupils. Staff expectations of what pupils can achieve are low. Teachers' assessments of pupils are not consistently accurate. Staff's knowledge of the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics is weak. Teaching assistants are not used well. Pupils achieve far too little during their time in the school.
- The quality of teaching across classes over time is poor and leaders do not give enough help to staff to improve pupils' progress.
- Teaching does not stretch the abilities of the most able pupils to help them become as skilful and knowledgeable as it is their right to be.
- Reviews by leaders of the quality of the school are not conducted with enough skill to spot where improvement is needed.
- Leaders do not have an insight into pupils' learning in science because they do not regularly check the quality of pupils' work.
- The skills of middle leaders are not strong enough to support the new headteacher sufficiently to move the school forward. Leaders are too dependent upon help from the local authority to improve the school.
- Disadvantaged pupils leave school unprepared for the next stage of their education. The school does too little to make sure they catch up with other pupils nationally. Expectations of the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are too low.

The school has the following strengths

- The safeguarding of pupils across the school is well-developed and overseen carefully by the new headteacher. Staff are well-trained in making sure pupils are protected.
- Children in the early years achieve well because of strong leadership and good teaching.
- The new headteacher has been quick to identify that many aspects of the school need to improve. He has already taken firm steps to improve the attendance of pupils. He has maintained the successful focus of the school upon pupils' personal development and behaviour.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of school leadership and management by:
 - strengthening the knowledge and skills of middle leaders to give leadership to their area of responsibility in ways that improve teaching and pupils' outcomes
 - reviewing and improving the effectiveness of the leadership and support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - making sure arrangements for checking the work of the school are thorough, well-organised and planned so teaching across classes is reviewed fully over time and includes science as well as all other subjects
 - ensuring that governors and leaders have the skills to move the school forward without intensive external support
 - ensuring that the progress of all groups of pupils, including the most able and the disadvantaged, is assessed accurately and reviewed against that of pupils nationally by staff, leaders and governors
 - ensuring that regular checks are made on the quality of pupils' learning in different subjects across the school, including in their books
 - ensuring that all checks on the quality of teaching consider the impact of teaching on pupils' progress and link to clear feedback for staff about how to improve teaching.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in order to raise standards and make sure all pupils achieve well by:
 - reviewing and strengthening teachers' and teaching assistants' knowledge of how to teach writing, reading and mathematics
 - ensuring that pupils' work engages their interest and challenges pupils of all abilities
 - ensuring that all staff understand what to expect of pupils at different ages and that assessments of pupils are accurate
 - ensuring that teachers support and make full use of the skills of teaching assistants within teaching
 - assessing pupils accurately in activities and adapting teaching if they are finding work too easy or too difficult
 - raising expectations of what pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils, are able to do and of the progress they can make.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Over time, governors and leaders have failed to prevent a decline in the quality of education provided by the school. They have not reviewed teaching or learning well enough to identify key issues and bring about necessary improvement. Recent assistance to the school from the local authority is proving beneficial but leaders are too dependent upon this external support for moving the school forward.
- Leaders' understanding of the quality of teaching over time and across subjects in the school is inadequate. They are unsure where teaching in the school is strongest and where support for improvement should be focused most. For example, leaders do not know if the extensive time given to teaching groups of pupils to read is successful because the impact has not been reviewed for some years. In science, leaders do not know whether pupils' learning is of any worth because leaders have not reviewed the quality of pupils' work across classes for several months. Consequently, weaknesses in teaching and pupils' learning are not being spotted and tackled and pupils' progress is being held back.
- Middle leaders do not have the skills needed to assist the new headteacher to urgently improve the school. Their work makes too little difference to improve pupils' learning across different subjects. The leadership of provision and expenditure for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is weak; consequently, too few of these pupils' needs are being met.
- Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching give too little consideration to the impact of teaching on pupils' progress. Points identified for teachers to improve are not precise enough to make sure pupils' learning will be accelerated. The quality of teaching is not improving fast enough.
- Leaders are not giving teachers enough challenge about how well disadvantaged pupils at Portland achieve compared with other pupils nationally. The school faces a significant challenge to ensure that these pupils make as much progress as they need to. Expectations of disadvantaged pupils' progress are low. In addition, leaders do not have enough understanding of where the school pupil premium funding is making the biggest and the least difference to pupils' learning. Leaders do not know what more they should be doing to help pupils catch up.
- The curriculum, including extra-curricular activities, gives pupils a broad and balanced range of different learning. Pupils who spoke to inspectors said they enjoy a range of activities such as karate and drama. Parents commented positively to inspectors that the new headteacher has introduced many more events, trips and clubs to the school since his arrival. However, leaders are not reviewing the impact of the school curriculum on pupils' development and learning.
- Pupils at Portland are given valuable opportunities to develop their readiness for life in modern Britain. For example, activities such as the work of the school council are giving pupils positive opportunities to understand democracy. Pupils enjoy regular fund-raising events at the school and are gaining an increased understanding and respect for people facing various difficulties.

- The additional funding for physical education is used and reviewed well. Pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are increasingly benefiting from a range of extra learning, including specific gymnastics activities aimed at meeting their needs, in after-school sessions. They are becoming skilled and confident in their bodily movements and expression.
- The new headteacher has identified some key issues quickly and started to address them. For example, he has acted quickly to make sure arrangements to keep pupils safe were reviewed and updated. He identified that staff need greater development and training. Staff are now beginning to visit other schools to observe and discuss teaching, learning and leadership. Parents are engaging far more with the school about their child's learning and development needs. Having identified weaknesses in the school's assessments of pupils, the headteacher has overhauled arrangements for tracking and reviewing the progress of pupils. However, it is too early to see the impact of these very recent reforms on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.

Governance of the school

- Governance in the past has been ineffective. Governors did not challenge or hold leaders to account fully for the quality of education in the school. Governors did not spot that standards in the school were declining. They did not have a clear understanding of the impact of pupil premium money upon the progress of pupils in the school. Governors had little impact upon school arrangements to manage, support and improve the work of staff.
- Since the arrival of the new headteacher and the recent involvement of the local authority with their discussions, the work of the governing body is now more robust and detailed. Appropriate arrangements are in place for the performance management of the new headteacher. Governors are beginning to have a fuller understanding of the school. They are aware of the many challenges the school faces to give pupils, families and staff a much-improved life at Portland. Nonetheless, it is too soon to see the impact of recent improvements in the work of governors.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The new headteacher has made sure all arrangements for the care and protection of pupils meet requirements and are working well. He has made sure the school site is fully secure and that good links are being made with other services to support the protection of pupils.
- Staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to keep an eye on the well-being of all pupils. Staff know how to record any concerns about pupils' welfare accurately and securely. They know what to do if they are concerned about the behaviour of any adult. Families are given plentiful information about safe online behaviour. The headteacher is not complacent about safeguarding; he is actively keeping himself and other leaders informed about new guidance and advice, such as about the dangers of pupils sending inappropriate content via mobile technology. Staff know how to recognise the signs of abuse, such as neglect. They understand how to prevent pupils being exposed to radicalised views of the world.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time is weak. Teachers have not been supported well by leaders to improve. Teachers have not kept up with some of the significant changes taking place in schools, so for example they do not know what to expect of pupils at different ages. These weaknesses undermine the accuracy of assessment across the school and are affecting how well the needs of different pupils are being identified and met across classes and subjects.
- Pupils leave the early years prepared for key stage 1, but staff are not then building successfully upon pupils' existing skills and knowledge. Teaching in Years 1 and 2 in reading, writing and mathematics is not being matched well to the abilities of current pupils. Across the school, some teachers give pupils far too much to do because they have not properly considered what their class of pupils need.
- Across the school, teachers are not making the best use of teaching assistants to support and extend teaching. For example, teaching assistant support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not always planned, communicated or checked properly by the class teacher. Poor teamwork is limiting pupils' progress. Weak subject knowledge among teachers is affecting their ability to teach mathematics, English and science successfully.
- Teaching for the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, is weak. There is too little consideration of how to extend these pupils' learning in different subjects. Too often in mathematics, when pupils have grasped concepts quickly, they are not being set work with enough challenge to deepen their understanding further.
- The teaching of writing across the school is poor. Teachers have focused too much upon trying to increase the amount of writing in history, geography and science at the expense of improving pupils' skills and passion for writing. In some classes, teachers are asking pupils to complete so many unrelated writing tasks and then providing pupils with so much assistance, that pupils lose interest, do not develop their language and become disheartened.
- Staff are not giving pupils enough support to become keen, enthusiastic, skilled readers. The school library is unenticing and poorly organised. Too little is done to promote high-quality fiction and non-fiction books across the school. In some classes, staff are not helping less-able pupils enough to develop the ability to tackle difficult words by blending sounds together. Nor are they helping pupils enough to check the sense of how a sentence sounds when read. Assessment is not being used fully to match planned phonics activities to the needs of pupils, for example middle-ability pupils. Arrangements to promote pupils' reading in classes and at home are weak and checked poorly by leaders.
- Pupils say they enjoy their lessons in music and physical education.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils feel their views matter to staff. They feel listened to. For example, they were very pleased to see the school acted on their suggestion for bins in the garden areas. Pupils around school are happy. Those pupils who have struggled in the past with how they feel about themselves report that Portland has helped them to feel confident and settled.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective. For example, pupils are helped to understand issues such as food poverty and the importance of community service. Pupils also gain a good awareness of different religions as well as the importance of looking after the natural environment.
- Pupils say differences between people are respected by other pupils and staff. For example, they say that pupils being 'gay' is respected at school. Pupils have a well-developed knowledge about various types of bullying because the school places emphasis on events such as the recent 'anti-bullying week'. They told inspectors that instances of bullying are rare and dealt with swiftly and successfully by staff.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, whether they are in school or out in the community. Internet safety is promoted well and pupils have a good understanding of what makes for safe behaviour when online. In Year 1, for example, pupils know to guard the privacy of their personal information when using the internet. Pupils across the school know that staff check fire safety through regular fire alarm testing and fire drills. Younger pupils understand the importance of checking to see if visitors are wearing a visitor's badge.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Throughout the school, pupils are polite, helpful and courteous. They show genuine interest in visitors. In classrooms, even though the quality of teaching is weak, pupils show good self-discipline and know to focus their attention on what they are being asked to do.
- Pupils show respect for staff and the school premises. They move calmly around the school including on staircases. They arrive punctually at lessons.
- In the past pupils' attendance at school has been a concern. Since May 2016 the headteacher has tackled the matter with great seriousness. He is changing the culture of the school to one where attendance is promoted and celebrated extensively. Good attendance is emphasised as a core value of the school and any absence is followed up swiftly. Overall attendance is now in line with the national average and punctuality is improving quickly. Many of the pupils with the most persistent absences from school have shown a sharp, positive rise in their school attendance in recent months following a close focus by staff upon their individual circumstances. However, leaders and governors do not review the attendance of different groups of pupils to build upon the positive improvements achieved.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Over time, pupils in key stages 1 and 2 are making too little progress in their skills and knowledge across subjects. Weaknesses in teaching, assessment and school leadership are holding pupils back from making up the gaps they have in their knowledge and understanding. Too many pupils leave the school ill-prepared for the demands of learning at secondary school.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not progress as well as they should. Staff and leaders are not reviewing the quality of support or the impact on these pupils' progress sufficiently.
- Too much attention is given in classes to assisting pupils who need to catch up: these pupils are becoming too dependent upon the help of staff with their learning. In addition, the needs of the most able pupils are too often not given enough support from staff.
- In the new national assessments for seven- and eleven-year-olds in 2016, too many pupils at Portland, including disadvantaged pupils, achieved poorly in writing. Weaknesses in the progress of current pupils in writing are evident in their work across the school. Pupils are not becoming the skilled, passionate writers that they need to be. There are too many examples of pupils not becoming confident enough to write neatly or independently. Too few pupils are being inspired to write. In key stage 2, too many current pupils lack understanding of how to select words precisely to include within their writing for formal and less formal audiences. Pupils struggle to select different verb forms for specific reasons in their writing.
- Pupils' progress in reading in the school has been an issue in the recent past and it remains a weakness for current pupils. While pupils' outcomes in the Year 1 phonics check are improving year-on-year and are broadly in line with the national picture, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils remains below the national average. By the end of key stage 1, middle-ability pupils are not progressing as well as they can in their phonics because of the limited challenge set by staff. In sessions where pupils are reading in a group with a teacher, pupils are making too little progress in their reading skills. The impact on pupils' progress of a school-funded volunteer programme to support readers is unclear. Too many pupils in key stages 1 and 2, including disadvantaged pupils, do not enjoy books and are not reading widely or often. Few pupils can talk about a range of authors with confidence.
- The progress made by pupils in mathematics in key stage 2 is a weakness in the school. Current most-able pupils in some classes in key stages 1 and 2 are being insufficiently challenged in their mathematical learning. A number of current most-able pupils from key stage 2 told inspectors they are concerned that their mathematics work is too easy.
- In science, pupils are not leaving the school with the necessary skills and knowledge upon which learning needs to build at secondary school. The school cannot explain how well different groups of current or recent pupils progress in science because leaders make insufficient checks on the quality of pupils' work across classes. The work set for pupils in science, for example in key stage 2, is not consistently challenging.

- Disadvantaged pupils are not making enough progress in their learning because of low staff expectations and weak teaching. Published information shows that in recent years in key stage 1, more and more disadvantaged pupils are behind other pupils nationally in mathematics, writing and reading. Leaders' plans are unclear as to how these pupils, now in key stage 2, will be assisted to catch up quickly and successfully. Pupil premium funding is used mostly to fund the employment of teaching assistants but leaders have not reviewed the impact of this considerable expenditure thoroughly.

Early years provision

Good

- Children gain a good start to their education through their attendance at the Nursery and Reception classes. From starting points that are below those typical for three-year-olds, children progress well. Links with parents and with other professionals are well-developed. Teaching is good and staff work well together as a team. While disadvantaged children achieve less than other children, the difference between these groups is diminishing over time. Additional funding is used well to give disadvantaged children extra help to catch up in their learning.
- Children behave well, enjoy their time in the early years and benefit much from attending. Their physical skills, communication and language as well as their personal, social and emotional development grow rapidly. They are becoming enthusiastic writers, interested mathematicians and keen artists and musicians.
- The school provides young children with many valuable opportunities to play, explore and investigate. Staff model language well and give thoughtful support for children's talk and communication skills. Questioning is used well to help children to think about their learning. For example, Reception children hearing the story of 'The Gruffalo' were challenged not only to identify their favourite character but to justify their choice.
- Provision for the youngest children at Portland is managed by a knowledgeable and skilful early years coordinator. She has overseen significant improvements in the teaching and learning of three- and four-year-olds at the school in recent years. For example, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has risen sharply and is in line with the national average. The early years part of the school outshines key stages 1 and 2 because of the strong leadership and resolute commitment of the staff in Nursery and Reception to improve.
- Such is the success of the early years coordinator that she is now away from school, seconded to another more senior job elsewhere. Unfortunately, this means the school leadership team is without her expertise to assist the new headteacher with wider improvements in the school.
- In the absence of the early years coordinator, the school has appointed a highly qualified teacher with a specialism in early years education to teach the school's Reception class. This teacher is a newly qualified teacher and so to assist with her development the school is engaging closely with the local authority. As a result, early years provision in the school continues to improve well.
- Good use is made of the indoor and outdoor early years classroom areas for learning. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to support children. They have a good knowledge of individual children's needs and use information well to plan

teaching that extends children's skills and interests. Nonetheless, the quality of the indoor spaces is less well-developed in the Nursery than in the Reception class.

School details

Unique reference number	105037
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	10000920

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	173
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kathy Smith
Headteacher	Phil Crossley
Telephone number	0151 652 5124
Website	www.portland.wirral.sch.uk/
Email address	headteacher@portland.wirral.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	18–19 June 2012

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about governance on its website.
- The school is below average in size and the overall number of pupils is lower than at the time of the previous inspection.
- Portland Primary is a two-storey building with the early years and key stage 1 situated on the ground floor and key stage 2 on the first floor.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum requirements for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Most pupils are White British. A very small minority of pupils are from a range of minority ethnic groups.

- The proportion of pupils who speak English as additional language is below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the government's pupil premium funding is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. Very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The headteacher joined the school in May 2016.

Information about this inspection

- On both days of the inspection, inspectors spoke to parents as they brought their children to school. There were too few responses to assess Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.
- The inspectors spoke to pupils in classes and around the school. One inspector spoke to a sample of pupils chosen at random from Year 1 to Year 6. Inspectors listened to pupils read in Year 2 and Year 4.
- The inspectors observed learning and teaching throughout the school, including outdoors. The inspectors reviewed examples of the work of different ability groups of pupils in different subjects. Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) made observations and reviewed pupils' work jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors spoke with several staff throughout the inspection, including the headteacher and others with leadership roles. HMI spoke with the early years leader who is currently on secondment.
- HMI met with four members of the governing body, including the chair. He spoke with a member of the Wirral local authority school improvement team.
- The inspectors considered a range of documents, including policies, reviews and plans by leaders and a local authority review of the school undertaken in October 2016. A check was also made of the school admissions register and classroom registers.

Inspection team

Tim Vaughan, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Moiria Atkins	Ofsted Inspector
Kathy Nichol	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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