

Portland Spencer Academy

Westwick Road, Bilborough, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire NG8 4HB

Inspection dates

12–13 January 2017

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Outstanding |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Outstanding |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Early years provision | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and executive headteacher are highly effective. Their relentless drive for excellence has brought about rapid and continuous improvement across the school.
- The compelling culture of a determination to excel is shared across the school and rigorously promoted by all leaders.
- Governors have a clear and detailed knowledge of the school and community. They use their range of skills effectively to challenge leaders and contribute to the continual drive to improve.
- The academy trust provides highly effective training for staff at all levels and has ensured that robust systems have been quickly established to sustain improvements.
- The highly effective leadership ensures that teaching is at least good. There is particularly strong practice in key stage 1 and at the end of key stage 2.
- Pupils now make good progress from their starting points, with pupils particularly showing strong progress in their skills and confidence in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils are impeccably behaved across all times of the school day, showing their pride and aspiration to do their best.
- Pupils are keen to learn because the school's curriculum interests and entuses them. It is particularly effective at preparing them to be confident and responsible for their futures.
- The early years leader ensures that children make a positive start to school. Children benefit from active and interesting activities that develop their language and confidence to learn.
- Pupils say that they feel safe, well cared for and trust adults across the school to listen and support them. Parents also have a high level of confidence in how well their children are being cared for.
- Teachers do not consistently ensure that pupils apply their English grammar, punctuation and spelling effectively to improve and extend their writing across the curriculum.
- Teachers do not consistently spot when pupils, particularly the most able, are ready to be moved on to more challenging learning, to ensure that they make more rapid progress.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate pupils' progress, especially that of the most able pupils, by ensuring that teachers:
 - require pupils to apply English grammar, punctuation and spelling accurately and consistently in their writing across the curriculum
 - swiftly identify when pupils are ready to move on to greater challenge.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher and executive headteacher have a passion and determination to secure the best for every pupil. They have established a shared vision of high aspiration and excellence. This is based on a deep understanding of effective leadership, teaching and learning, combined with a thorough understanding of the needs of pupils and families in the local community. This culture is understood and subscribed to by all members of the school community.
- Leaders' transformation of the culture of the school is to be particularly celebrated and commended, considering issues previously identified by Ofsted about the predecessor school, including teachers' low expectations, low-level disruption in classes and variable behaviour around school. Pupils and staff are now extremely proud to be part of the school.
- The headteacher and executive headteacher have used the high-quality training and guidance provided by the academy trust extremely well. They have made particularly effective use of this expertise and the skills of their best internal staff to build confidence and skills across leaders. Consequently, in a short time, the school has built a highly effective senior and middle leadership team.
- Leaders frequently check what teachers are doing in the classroom and their assessments of how well pupils are learning. This information is then quickly acted upon to give precise feedback and inform personal and whole-school programmes of training. This has secured rapid improvements in teaching, especially in literacy and mathematics. Teaching in key stage 1 and Year 6 is particularly strong.
- Leaders have a detailed understanding of the abilities of their staff and have made careful decisions about deployment during ongoing change. They have used this knowledge to make sure that new staff, especially newly qualified teachers, receive a thorough induction and tailored support from their most highly skilled colleagues. This is ensuring that consistently good teaching is maintained and is contributing effectively to the good and better outcomes for current pupils.
- The high quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is clearly evident in pupils' keenness to improve their work and the exemplary way that pupils support and care for each other. All staff are extremely effective in modelling and promoting high expectations and aspirations for every pupil. The central tenet of 'aspire' has generated a culture of shared endeavour between pupils and staff.
- The celebration of fundamental British values is also woven through school life. Pupils are very well prepared to be confident, active citizens. The school's 'STARFISH' approach promotes the belief that every pupil can make a difference and is understood and referred to by the pupils. Pupils take on roles across the school with confidence and pride, such as those of class greeters, mini-teachers, play buddies and pupil leaders. They feel confident that they are listened to and valued.

- The overall curriculum is carefully planned to engage, enthuse and prepare pupils to step confidently out into the world. School leaders are particularly committed to putting the importance of communication and looking outwards at the heart of their learning. Pupils enjoy a range of interesting visits and visitors, including theatre groups and residential visits, to support and extend their learning. Leaders are rightly committed to ensuring that pupils have a better understanding of world religions and cultures to further strengthen pupils' global awareness.
- Leaders are improving parent participation through offering a wide range of helpful and informative information on the website, frequent communication about how their child is doing through the school rewards system, and invitations to assemblies and events to share learning. Parents of older pupils particularly comment upon the significant improvements in recent years.
- Leaders use the additional pupil premium funding highly effectively. Although the main priority is to improve outcomes for eligible pupils, the school recognises that pupils' well-being is the essential platform for their achievement. The school has made a high level of investment in a responsive and skilled 'team around the child' that uses rigorous assessment and tracking to provide responsive nurture and guidance to quickly support pupils and families to get back on track. Teaching assistants are well trained to provide excellent support for vulnerable pupils. Leaders also ensure that these pupils have every chance to participate and be successful in all aspects of timetabled and extra-curricular activities.
- Leaders use the additional funding from the physical education and sport grant to very good effect. They have ensured that teachers have worked alongside expert coaches and received effective training to improve their teaching and coaching skills. Pupils have had many opportunities to take part in a range of sports, including an annual inspirational sports week that gave access to a diverse range of sports, including a climbing wall, a mobile skate park, taekwondo and blind football. The appointment of a sports apprentice has provided a further positive role model around the school, as well as varying the range of regular sports opportunities.

Governance of the school

- Governors contribute effectively to the culture to excel that is established across the school leadership team. The academy trust is highly effective in contributing to and strengthening local school governance.
- Governors have a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They share the relentless drive to continue to improve the quality of teaching and progress for all pupils. Minutes from governing body meetings and reports illustrate their ability to ask school leaders searching and challenging questions.
- The governing body is well organised and uses governors' skills and expertise effectively to add value to overall leadership. The governors assiduously test out and scrutinise the wide range of information they receive. This allows them to hold school leaders effectively to account and to improve outcomes for all pupils.

- Governors have a thorough understanding of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and the use of the pupil premium and physical education and sport funding. They have an accurate view of its impact. They have a thorough understanding of the headteacher's rigorous use of the management of teachers' performance to hold staff accountable for effective teaching and pupils' outcomes.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There are clear and rigorous systems and procedures in place, which are understood by all staff. Leaders keep precise records to ensure effective and timely work with external agencies. Staff and governors receive relevant training and updates, including on radicalisation and extremism.
- The culture of safeguarding in the school is evident in children feeling safe and parents' confidence that the school cares well for their children. Learning about how to keep safe is woven into pupils' learning across the school curriculum; for example, pupils told inspectors that they learn about internet safety every month and were able to talk about their 'digital footprint'.
- Case studies and records show that potentially vulnerable children and families are extremely well supported. Governors and school leaders recognise the need to support the welfare of all pupils, hence the high level of investment in welfare provision, including an attendance improvement officer and a play therapist. Leaders are quick to follow up on any concerns and to check this against information on assessment and attendance, to then put in place appropriate interventions, such as nurture or play therapy. Thorough records show timely intervention and at least good progress for current identified pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Leaders' robust and focused drive for excellence has been effective in securing significant improvements to teaching and learning.
- These significant improvements are from a low starting point. There has been a high level of staff change and turbulence since the school opened as an academy. This has continued this year, with a number of new teachers joining the school in September.
- Leaders provide excellent support for teachers new to the school. This ensures that new recruits understand and appreciate the school's values and expectations. Consequently, despite considerable changes in staffing, the quality of teaching throughout the school is good.
- Leaders particularly ensure that induction of new staff emphasises the school's high expectations and behaviour policy, so that the culture of respect, care and aspiration for pupils is a consistent feature in all classrooms.
- Leaders use frequent checking of teaching and how well pupils are doing to give immediate feedback, backed up by effective individual and whole-staff training, to secure continuous and often rapid improvements to teaching.

- Leaders give the same priority to feedback and ongoing training for more experienced staff, which has secured areas of excellence, particularly in English and mathematics in key stage 1 and Year 6. Leaders ensure that excellent practice is shared and part of the comprehensive training programme to continue the rapid improvements in teaching, to contribute to the good and better outcomes for current pupils.
- Teachers use the school's assessment and tracking systems well to inform their planning. As a result, all pupils are progressively being taught reading, writing and mathematical skills that are appropriate for their age. However, not all teachers give pupils sufficient opportunities for explaining and developing their thinking, to deepen their understanding. In key stage 1 and upper key stage 2, frequent opportunities are used effectively in English and mathematics, but these opportunities are not equally well developed in other subjects, such as science and geography.
- Phonics is well taught and pupils use their knowledge to tackle tricky and unfamiliar words successfully in their reading and writing. Inspectors heard a number of pupils read from Year 2 and Year 6, including the most able readers. They were keen to read and were able to use strategies appropriate to their age.
- Teaching of reading is effective. Teachers' use of effective questioning is a consistent feature that is extending pupils' language and understanding. The school's 'heart' curriculum framework is built around a high-quality book, to make sure that pupils are exposed to a range of interesting and challenging texts. For example, the current Year 6 book was 'Macbeth'. Pupils are beginning to improve their stamina to develop their responses to more probing questions, especially where teachers are more skilled at spotting when pupils are ready to move on to challenge.
- Writing is taught effectively across the school through interesting topics. Teachers make good connections between reading and creative writing, which add to pupils' enjoyment of writing and the quality of their work. However, not all teachers ensure that pupils apply their grammatical, punctuation and spelling skills consistently and accurately when writing across the curriculum.
- High-quality training has raised the quality of teaching in mathematics. Teachers make good use of resources and effective questioning to help pupils master areas such as place value, fractions and angles. For example, pupils in Year 6 were able to confidently explain their understanding of the internal angles of a quadrilateral and also using knowledge of angles on a straight line to calculate missing angles. However, the progress of the most able pupils is sometimes slowed when they are not moved on to tasks that offer additional challenge.
- Teachers effectively plan teaching assistants' work. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils receive support that successfully promotes good academic and personal progress.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils are passionate about the school's 'Aspire' pact and how it has transformed their school. They say that it permeates all aspects of school life, telling inspectors, 'we have high expectations'. The pupils confidently express the core values of 'Aspire', such as ambition, keenness to learn and respecting that everyone is important. Their pride was tangible as they received certificates to celebrate these values in assembly.
- The school places particular importance on giving pupils the confidence to have a voice to express and drive their own learning, through such devices as taking their turn on 'the class microphone' to report, explain or prove their learning.
- Pupils work well together across the school, listening respectfully to teachers and each other. Pupils consistently take pride in their work across the whole school and celebrate their own and each other's successes. This is visible in displays, through assemblies, in books and within the classroom.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe and feel very safe in school. They know whom to speak to in school if they have any worries. They told inspectors that bullying is 'several times on purpose' and explained different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. Pupils said that bullying is rare, but were clear on what to do if it were to occur.
- Parents who spoke to inspectors and responded to Parent View and to school questionnaires are highly positive about the support their children receive. They are rightly confident that their children are happy and safe.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils are highly courteous and considerate towards each other and adults, including visitors in the school.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and enjoy coming to school. One of the proud and polite class greeters keenly invited an inspector to look at his work, telling her, 'I love a challenge and my maths has improved 125%.' Pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons is impeccable. Interruptions to learning are extremely rare.
- Pupils enjoy receiving rewards and celebrating achievement. This is a consistent feature around the school, with attractively presented displays further reinforcing and illustrating the pride and care continually shown by pupils in lessons.
- Pupils take a high level of responsibility for their actions and choices, due to the highly developed ethos of respect and active citizenship. Pupil leaders, carrying out their duties as mini-teachers and playtime buddies, showed that they had been carefully taught how to approach and talk to their peers. School sanctions, where required, are considered fair and well understood.

- Attendance is currently in line with the national average. Persistent absence has fallen to just below the national average. Highly tailored support for families whose children are regularly absent has brought about sustained improvement.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics are now improving in all year groups and some elements of this are rapid, because school leaders are relentless in their push for progress.
- Highly effective teaching in upper key stage 2, particularly Year 6, led to good progress in both 2015 and 2016 from low starting points. This progress was particularly strong in reading, where pupils at the end of Year 6 attained just above the national average.
- Pupils' outcomes in key stage 1 also show good progress from below-average starting points. By the end of Year 2, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was in line with the national averages in 2016.
- The results of the phonics screening check in Year 1 were also in line with national figures in 2015 and 2016.
- Overall results in 2016, given the very low historic prior attainment in key stage 1 and particularly in the early years, represent accelerated progress.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in their books and in lessons. Work recorded in pupils' books shows that pupils currently in the school are making good progress, and gaining the skills expected for their ages, in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils' knowledge and understanding in other subjects too demonstrate good teaching throughout the curriculum. This was particularly evident in science, where books and observations in lessons showed that key stage 1 pupils could carefully record their observations of investigations, while in key stage 2, pupils were posing questions and being guided to design their own investigations that considered which 'variables' needed to be kept constant, to answer their questions.
- Effective leadership is ensuring that additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used effectively. Pupils in both of these groups are making at least good progress.
- However, outcomes for the most able pupils are not as strong as for other groups. The proportions of pupils reaching the highest standards in reading, writing and mathematics, at the end of Years 2 and 6, have historically been continually well below the national averages. Scrutiny of pupils' work in books and in lessons shows that, although teachers are now planning for different levels of challenge, teachers are not consistently swift in moving pupils on to greater challenge. Particularly in writing, teachers' expectations of pupils to extend their writing and accurately apply what they are being taught in grammar, punctuation and spelling are not consistently strong across all year groups.

Early years provision

Good

- Children in the early years enter with skills and abilities below those typically found for their age. In 2014, the proportion of children attaining a good level of development at the end of Reception Year was well below the national average. However, decisive actions by senior leaders brought about swift improvements to bring this in line with the national average in 2015. The appointment of an experienced and skilled early years leader during 2016 further consolidated these improvements and in 2016, the good level of development was again close to the national average. This is good progress from low starting points. However, the number of children with skills exceeding those typical at the end of the Reception Year is well below that attained nationally.
- The early years leader sets high expectations across the whole teaching team. She is well supported by fellow senior school leaders. She is a highly effective early years teacher and she has ensured that children are provided with an environment rich in resources and with engaging and active learning opportunities. Adults act as effective models for speaking and listening. This is securing strong progress for children in language development and contributing effectively to their personal development, behaviour and welfare.
- The early years leader is ensuring that teachers use what they know about each individual child's development to plan the next stage of their learning. Scrutiny of children's current learning journals and observations in lessons provide evidence of children learning literacy skills across the curriculum. For example, children decided to build snake houses in the outdoor area and enthusiastically rehearsed the 's' sound as they completed and labelled their constructions with carefully formed 's' letters.
- Children settle quickly into the welcoming environment and enjoy learning through the wide range of interesting activities, maintaining concentration on tasks, with or without adult support. This is securing improving progress for all children, although opportunities are not taken to ensure that there is plenty of challenge for the most able children.
- Adults encourage safe play and use of resources and all of the children learn how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. Children are kept safe at all times and are well looked after by caring staff. This ethos ensures that children play happily and fairly together.
- Parents are rightly positive about the good start their children make in the early years classes. Parents are responding well to opportunities the school gives them to come and join in with their children's play-based learning. Parents are confident that their children are safe and well cared for and particularly value the approachability of staff.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 140550 |
| Local authority | Nottingham |
| Inspection number | 10023082 |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Academy sponsor-led |
| Age range of pupils | 3 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 431 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Jill Wilkinson |
| Headteacher/Executive Headteacher | Kate Green/Angela O'Brien |
| Telephone number | 0115 9155747 |
| Website | www.portlandspenceracademy.co.uk |
| Email address | admin@portland.nottingham.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The Portland Spencer Academy is larger than the average-sized primary school. Most children attending the school come from the immediate area.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage, but below the national average. The number who speak English as an additional language is just below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is well above the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- In 2015 and 2016, the school met the government's current floor standards for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.
- The school has been part of The Spencer Academies Trust since 1 February 2014 and the associated George Spencer Teaching School Alliance.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 28 lessons, including six joint observations with the headteacher and senior leaders. Inspectors observed the teaching of early reading skills and pupils were heard reading. The inspectors talked to pupils about their school and looked at pupils' books while visiting lessons. The team scrutinised a large sample of pupils' work jointly with the headteacher and leadership team, to gain a view of the impact of teaching over time.
- Inspectors held discussions with the school's senior and middle leaders, representatives of the governing body and representatives of The Spencer Academies Trust.
- Inspectors spoke to parents informally at the start of both school days, and considered 15 responses to the Ofsted online parent questionnaire, Parent View, and responses to the school's parent questionnaires. They also considered 39 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching, the most recent information on pupils' achievement and progress, and information relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and punctuality.
- Inspectors considered the range and quality of information provided on the school's website.

Inspection team

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|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Mandy Wilding, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector |
| Emma Hollis-Brown | Ofsted Inspector |
| Antony Witheyman | Ofsted Inspector |

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