

Poltair School

Trevarthian Road, St Austell, Cornwall PL25 4BZ

Inspection dates

6–7 February 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet consistently good across all subjects.
- Pupils are not often enough making the progress they are capable of, especially in English and mathematics.
- Examination results in 2017 did not show sufficiently high outcomes in some subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Leaders have introduced systems and policies to improve standards of teaching, but these are not always applied consistently.

The school has the following strengths

- School leaders, including governors, have focused on raising expectations in the entire school community. This has led to a positive response in many aspects of the school's work.
- The headteacher, governors and senior staff are showing strong leadership in addressing issues of slow progress. Improvements are now evident for all groups of pupils.
- Senior leaders have worked to ensure that middle leaders received training and developed the skills to be more effective in raising standards. There is evidence of positive impact throughout the school.
- The school's curriculum is suitably broad. Senior leaders are reviewing the provision to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of all pupils.
- Leaders have worked with considerable success to raise attendance. These improvements have now been sustained over several years.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. The use of exclusion as a sanction has been reduced. This reflects success in preventing poor behaviour.
- Pupils are polite and well behaved and conduct themselves responsibly around the school site. They treat others with respect and are tolerant of differences.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. Pupils learn how to look after themselves and minimise risk of harm.
- Pupils have good opportunities to extend their learning opportunities outside formal lessons.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment and so raise pupils' achievement by ensuring that:
 - the school's policies are applied consistently by all teachers
 - teachers' planning takes into account the needs of all learners
 - teachers check that pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are secure before moving on to new learning
 - pupils understand the purpose of their learning and how to apply their new knowledge
 - pupils know how to make improvements to their work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders have created a culture of improvement. The headteacher provides clear leadership and, throughout the school, there is evidence of raised expectations.
- Some members of the senior leadership team have joined the school recently; this has strengthened the capacity for further improvements. Each member of the leadership team has a clearly defined role, which is understood throughout the staff body.
- High priority has been given to developing the leadership skills of teachers responsible for leading subject areas. They have received high-quality professional development training, provided through the local authority school effectiveness team. Inspectors saw that this training has enabled middle leaders to improve the quality of work in subject areas. Most middle leaders monitor the work of their colleagues effectively and help to bring about further improvements.
- There has been a very thorough review of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The school has a comprehensive collection of data, which has been analysed and used to plan improvement actions. Regular reviews are scheduled, so that leaders can check the impact of the school's work.
- The quality of teaching has been improved, although senior leaders are aware that there is still more work to be done to ensure consistency and maximise impact on pupils' progress. Continuing professional development has been given to all teachers, much of it tailored to address specific needs.
- The morale of staff members is good, and inspectors saw evidence that the investment in development and training has been valued. Particular regard is given to the system of 'buddy challenge partners', which has paired teachers so that they can benefit from sharing expertise.
- The school's curriculum is broad, offering pupils a wide range of subjects and qualifications in key stage 4. Leaders are currently conducting a review and plan to expand the curriculum further, in order to prepare pupils for their future lives. One planned development is the expansion of provision for learning another language. Up to this point, the school has taught French, but in September 2018 Spanish will be added.
- The school offers appropriate courses for the most able pupils. Several parents and carers expressed high satisfaction with the arrangements for stretching and challenging pupils, for example those who show an aptitude for mathematics. This provision includes opportunities for regular visits to study mathematics at the University of Exeter, helping to raise aspirations further.

Governance of the school

- Members of the governing body work closely with senior leaders to improve the effectiveness of the school's work. Governors are well aware of the strengths of the school and the aspects of its work which need to be strengthened. Collectively,

governors have a wide range of appropriate skills and expertise. They work with the local authority to ensure that they have the capacity to challenge and support senior leaders.

- Governors have a clear overview of leaders' work and review its impact in a regular cycle. Through meetings with staff, consideration of reports and visits to the school, they ensure that they can assess the effectiveness of leaders' work, including safeguarding.
- Careful monitoring is ensuring that funds allocated to particular purposes, such as providing support to disadvantaged pupils, are having a positive impact.
- Priority is being given to raising the quality of teaching, and leaders are supported in this with rigorous performance management processes. Governors also ensure that appropriate training and support are available to members of staff for their professional development.
- Governors have faced numerous challenges in filling some vacancies, which arose for reasons beyond their control. They have explored numerous options to resolve issues, including supporting the retraining of teachers for work in subjects for which recruitment is particularly difficult.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Governors and senior leaders have ensured that all policies and procedures are fit for purpose. Thorough checks are carried out to ensure that all staff are suitable to work with children. All members of staff are suitably and regularly trained in safeguarding matters.
- The school's student services support base has highly trained staff, including some who work with pupils' families to support and help them.
- The school works effectively with a range of other agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Detailed records are kept if any concerns are raised about safety and matters of well-being. Further checks are made to ensure that any follow-up actions are taken.
- The school roll includes pupils who are looked after. School leaders are tenacious in working with other agencies to ensure their safety and well-being.
- There is high awareness about safeguarding throughout the school, by staff and pupils. Senior leaders successfully promote positive messages about safeguarding in a variety of ways, for example when encouraging safe and appropriate use of electronic communications. Throughout the school community, there is a culture of vigilance.
- The school's work includes training in the 'Prevent' duty, which is designed to protect pupils who may be vulnerable to radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment varies across the school and within departments and is not yet consistently good. Raised expectations and training are securing improvements, but teaching standards are not yet high enough to ensure that all pupils are making good progress.
- The quality of teaching in English and mathematics is variable. Inconsistencies are being addressed. Effective support is being given where needed, and so some further improvements are being made now.
- Teachers are provided with appropriate information about pupils' skills and knowledge to help them with planning learning activities. Senior leaders have a strong belief that learning tasks are suitably challenging for pupils. In many lessons, this is now the case, although inspectors noted that planning is not as strong in some areas, such as technology.
- Senior leaders have identified the need to develop the skills of teachers so that they are able to use questioning techniques more effectively. Inspectors agree with this. Some teachers overuse restricted questions or do not check pupils' skills, understanding and knowledge before moving on to a new topic. This leads to some insecurities and reduces pupils' confidence in their ability to tackle new learning.
- Teachers' planning includes a particular focus to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make good progress. Leaders creditably told us that, in doing this, all pupils benefit from the approaches taken by the teacher. In a similar manner, teachers are provided with detailed information about the specific needs of any pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.
- The school's policy for marking and providing feedback to pupils is not being applied consistently across subjects. Sometimes, pupils do not understand how they should improve their work.
- Sometimes, teachers do not ensure that pupils understand the purpose of a learning activity. When this happens, the pace of a lesson can drop, and pupils are not secure in how they should apply their learning to new challenges. This was noticed by inspectors in science and French, for example.
- Inspectors saw that relationships between pupils and their teachers are good and provide a secure learning environment. Most pupils have good attitudes to learning and cooperate well with each other. Most pupils present their work with pride.
- The leadership team is conscious that pupils need to have secure skills in literacy, numeracy and communication. Effective actions are being taken to enhance these skills across all subjects. For example, at the time of the inspection, there was a focus on the correct use of apostrophes. Numeracy skills are being applied in geography lessons, and staff are being prepared to extend these opportunities in other subjects.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school has worked to establish a 'nurturing culture' where all pupils may thrive. For example, an inspector noted that one group of pupils clearly feels well supported. This was evident in the way they greeted the teacher responsible for coordinating their support. Numerous parents commented on the positive ethos of the school; for example, one parent wrote, 'I have found all staff to be helpful and show a real caring attitude towards my child and the progress she makes.'
- Their respect and care for each other is evident around the school when pupils spend leisure time together. Development of spiritual, moral, social and cultural values is good. One inspector witnessed a mature conversation between pupils who discussed how to show respect for people from backgrounds different from their own.
- Pupils have actively supported charities. To their credit, £32,000 has been raised over a five-year period and donated to various charities chosen by pupils.
- Pupils are helped to develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. For example, an assembly held during the inspection focused on online safety. Pupils engaged well with this and spoke confidently about their understanding of how to keep safe.
- A small number of parents and pupils expressed some concerns about bullying incidents. Inspectors took note of responses in surveys and made checks by speaking with pupils and members of staff. Pupils were asked about bullying in formal meetings, but were also spoken to around the school. Pupils told inspectors that, although there are occasional incidents, they know that they can speak to an adult about any problems and that the school will deal with the concerns promptly. The survey of staff unanimously confirmed the view that pupils are safe and that any incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively.
- The school provides many opportunities for pupils to extend their learning beyond formal lessons. Clubs include a mathematics club, activities for revision, homework and science work. Pupils may enjoy participating in a choir and numerous craft, sports and physical activities. A late bus service enables club participants to travel home.
- During the school year, pupils have opportunities to enrich their learning; for example, learning in history may be complemented with a visit to Berlin, and art with a visit to galleries in London. Activities such as this also help to prepare pupils for their future lives in modern Britain.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- In lessons and around the school, pupils are polite, courteous and generally positive about their school experience. Pupils move around the school in an orderly manner and

arrive at lessons punctually, despite the distances between some buildings.

- Uniform is worn with pride and pupils are well equipped for their lessons. They understand the importance of good attitudes to learning.
- Since 2015, overall attendance has improved significantly, and these improvements have been sustained. Current attendance rates are in line with the national average.
- The school takes appropriate steps to follow up non-attendance promptly and, as a result, persistent absence is reducing. The work of the student services support provision is helping to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN, groups which have previously been more difficult to engage in school.
- A small number of older pupils are educated at other centres in the county. Careful checks are made about their attendance and welfare. Leaders coordinate with the providers to ensure that they are making good progress in their learning and development. Close monitoring allows pupils to reintegrate into the school when they are ready to do so.
- In recent years, the school's use of exclusion as a sanction for poor behaviour has been above the national average. Leaders looked carefully to establish the chief causes of poor behaviour. Now they have in place strategies to help pupils to address these behaviours. These actions have been effective, behaviour has improved and the need to use exclusions has been reduced.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- In 2017 and previous years, examination results, particularly in English and mathematics, have not been good enough. By the end of Year 11, on average, pupils in this school have not made as much progress in these subjects as other pupils nationally.
- Examination results in other subject areas have been mixed in recent years. Typically, examination results in humanities subjects have been stronger, but in French they have been below the national average. Science results have usually reflected progress broadly in line with other that of pupils nationally.
- The school has shown more consistent success in other subject areas, such as art, physical education (PE) and vocational subjects. In 2017, overall outcomes, averaged over eight subjects, were the best achieved in recent years.
- Leaders have looked closely at how these successes may be replicated. Tackling weaknesses in teaching is now bringing about some improvements. Evidence collected by inspectors included observations in lessons, looking at samples of work and scrutiny of the school's tracking records. Inspectors could see that some stronger progress is now becoming evident in English, mathematics and other subjects.
- Leaders have been particularly concerned to improve the outcomes for pupils who do not complete their whole secondary education in this school. Often, these pupils join the school having complex issues, and continuity in their courses is frequently difficult. Leaders are persuasive that they are fully inclusive to all pupils and they are

resourceful in seeking solutions for these problems.

- Inspectors observed the learning of pupils in all year groups. There is evidence across the school that faster progress is being made. A considerable number of parents expressed particular satisfaction about the progress being made by pupils at the beginning of their secondary education.
- A focus of leaders has been to improve the progress made by the most able pupils. Improvements were seen in 2017 results, and a greater proportion reached the highest grades. The provision for current pupils is allowing them to make stronger progress than previously.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN has been slower than that of other pupils. Leaders are clear that there was a late approach to identifying barriers to learning, so the impact of strategies was limited in the past. Inspectors could see that these pupils are now making more secure progress.

School details

Unique reference number	112052
Local authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	10037078

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	650
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Coon
Headteacher	Stephen Tong
Telephone number	01726 874520
Website	www.poltairschool.co.uk
Email address	secretary@poltair.cornwall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 November 2015

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than average in size, and most pupils are of White British heritage.
- For a variety of reasons, a relatively high proportion of pupils join the school after the beginning of Year 7 or leave before the end of Year 11.
- The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils entitled to support by pupil premium funding is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above the national average.
- The school currently uses four alternative providers: The Community and Hospital Education Service (CHES) in Camborne, Restormel Acorn Academy in St Austell,

Penwith Acorn Academy in Penzance and North Cornwall Acorn Academy in Bodmin.

- The school has been monitored and supported by the local authority's school effectiveness team. It has also worked with the Peninsula Teaching School.
- In 2016, the school met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across all year groups in a wide range of subjects. Many of these observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher or other senior teachers.
- Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work across a broad range of subjects and talked to pupils about their learning.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, four members of the governing body, middle leaders and other teachers. A meeting was held with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors had formal meetings for discussions with pupils from every year group and also informal conversations with pupils around the school throughout the inspection.
- The conduct of pupils was observed in lessons and around the school during lesson changes and breaktimes.
- Inspectors examined a range of documentation including records of pupils' progress, attendance, behaviour and safeguarding records. Particular attention was given to the leaders' plans for making further improvements. Records of meetings of the governing body were scrutinised.
- The views of parents were considered through 50 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Forty-three members of staff responded to the inspection questionnaire and 68 pupils gave their views through the online questionnaire.

Inspection team

Ann Cox, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Julie Nash	Ofsted Inspector
Carol Hannaford	Ofsted Inspector
Non Davies	Ofsted Inspector

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