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15 February 2021

Robert Faulkner  
Executive Headteacher  
Portland School and Specialist College  
Uttoxeter Road  
Blythe Bridge  
Stoke-on-Trent  
ST11 9JG

Dear Mr Faulkner

### **No formal designation inspection of Portland School and Specialist College**

Following my inspection with Nicola Harwood, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 26 January 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the findings.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for no formal designation (NFD) inspections. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector wished to determine the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school as concerns had been raised with Ofsted about the effectiveness of leadership and management, the behaviour and attitudes of pupils and personal development of pupils at the school.

We do not give graded judgements on these inspections. Under normal circumstances, if we find some evidence that overall standards may be declining, but no serious concerns have been identified, then the next inspection of the school will normally be a section 5 inspection and be brought forward. If we identify significant concerns, we will deem this inspection as being completed under section 5 of the Act.

During the inspection of your school, serious concerns were identified. These related to leadership and management. The current leadership structure, including governance, is incomplete and fragile. This means that leaders' capacity to further stem the school's decline is severely limited. Due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic and the suspension of routine inspections, we have not treated this inspection as a section 5 inspection, as would be our usual practice. The school will be prioritised for a further inspection as soon as possible.

Having considered all the evidence and taking into account the impact of COVID-19 on the school, I am of the opinion that at this time:

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Priorities for further improvement:

- work closely with the local authority and the external consultants to build leadership capacity, in order to drive the improvements that are urgently required to provide pupils with the education they need
- as a matter of urgency, put in place a fully functioning and effective governing body to enable leaders to be held to account effectively
- develop and implement more robust systems to enable leaders to make sure that safeguarding and attendance procedures continue to be effective and to remedy the current weaknesses.

### **Context**

- The school has been through a significant period of turbulence since the previous inspection in 2018. Over the last year, a substantial number of key leaders and experienced staff have left the school. Currently, the school does not have a leader who is responsible for special educational needs or a head of school at the secondary site. A high proportion of teachers and teaching assistants are employed on temporary contracts. Two teaching posts remain unfilled.
- There have been significant changes in the governing body since November 2019. There are a number of vacancies on the governing body.
- From September 2020, a very small number of pupils were educated remotely. The rest of the pupils were expected to attend school full time.
- From the start of January 2021, only a small proportion of pupils have attended school on a full-time basis. The majority of pupils attend school on a part-time rota system. Most pupils access education on site for two days per week and then remotely for three days. A small proportion of pupils attend one of the school sites for three days per week.
- Approximately a third of pupils are currently not attending school at all.

### **Main findings**

- Staff have a strong understanding of pupils' vulnerabilities. They are alert to any sign that pupils may be at risk of harm both in and outside school. Staff know the risks pupils may face outside school such as gang and knife crime. The personal, social, health and economic curriculum is comprehensive and helps to teach pupils how to protect themselves from dangerous situations.

- Staff adhere to the school's safeguarding reporting procedures and notify the leaders responsible for safeguarding of any concerns immediately. Leaders record and follow up any concerns quickly. Leaders work closely with a range of outside agencies, such as social care and the police, to ensure that pupils receive the right support to keep them as safe as possible.
- A high number of new staff have joined the school over the last 18 months. Leaders have ensured that the required safeguarding checks have been carried out on staff and that basic safeguarding training has been completed. Staff have also been issued with an updated safeguarding policy which reflects the school's safeguarding procedures. However, leaders' oversight of staff training has not been good enough. Some new staff did not receive a detailed safeguarding induction. Staff safeguarding updates have been very limited since the start of the academic year. Inspection evidence showed that this has not compromised pupils' safety at this time. Nevertheless, these relative weaknesses in leaders' oversight of safeguarding have the potential to undermine the effectiveness of safeguarding as time goes on.
- The school's governing body has been through significant changes since November 2019. School leaders and governors are not working together well enough to drive school improvements. The fractured relationship between the governing body and school leaders is having a detrimental effect on the school's leadership and management. Governors are not holding school leaders to account. As a result, the ability of the school to provide pupils with the education they need is severely limited.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They have adults in school that they trust and know they can turn to if they have any concerns or worries. Pupils reported that behaviour in school last year deteriorated. They were confused by multiple changes to the behaviour policy. However, pupils say that since the beginning of September 2020 behaviour has started to improve, and school is calmer and more orderly. Behaviour records indicate that there was a high level of exclusions and serious behaviour incidents prior to September 2020. Behaviour records also confirm that incidents of challenging behaviour have reduced considerably since then. It should be noted that only approximately half the pupils have attended school at any one time since January 2021 which has, in some part, contributed to the further reduction in behaviour incidents.
- From January 2021, the majority of pupils are attending school on a part-time basis and receive the rest of their education remotely, via printed packs of work that are posted to their homes. A very small number of pupils are currently attending school full time. Staff are aware of the increased risk to pupils when not in school due to their vulnerabilities. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, staff have conducted regular checks on the pupils who are not in school, including making home visits, to ensure that they are safe and well. Pupils' attendance is recorded in line with statutory guidance. However, leaders' analysis of pupils' attendance is haphazard which makes it difficult to

track how often pupils access education in school and when they are accessing remote education. Despite the fact that pupils are spending much of their week at home, leaders have a limited overview of the extent to which pupils are engaging in remote education, and how effective remote education is.

- The school has had a number of different external support consultants over the last 18 months. The local authority brokered the support of a new consultant who started working with the school in January 2021. This support is very new and therefore the impact is yet to be seen. However, the consultant has already organised a range of support for the primary site and is working with leaders to develop further support to address the issues within the school.

## **Evidence**

This inspection was conducted on site due to concerns about safeguarding, pupils' behaviour and leadership and management.

We scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We met with the executive headteacher, the head of the primary school, the deputy headteacher, the safeguarding and senior family support officer, members of staff, pupils and school transport drivers. Telephone discussions were held with a representative of the local authority, two governors, a parent and the external support partner.

We also scrutinised behaviour and attendance records. We reviewed a range of additional documentation relating to governance and school improvement. We had a tour of the secondary school site and visited lessons in key stages 3 and 4.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Stoke-on-Trent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ann Pritchard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**