

Inspection of Portland School and Specialist College

Uttoxeter Road, Blythe Bridge, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST11 9JG

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 December 2021

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Inadequate

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school of two halves.

Leaders and staff on the secondary site have lost sight of the school's core purpose to support pupils' social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Consequently, pupils do not get the support they need. Too many secondary pupils are not engaged in their learning and do not achieve well.

Secondary pupils say they want to be in school, but they want it to be better. On the secondary site, leaders and staff do not manage behaviour consistently well. There are incidents when pupils' behaviour is out of control. Pupils feel unsafe when other pupils display challenging behaviour. Pupils are also concerned about bullying. They say staff do not deal with it effectively.

On the primary site, there is a calmer atmosphere. Staff manage pupils' behaviour well and provide bespoke support for pupils' SEMH needs. As a result, pupils focus on their work and make steady progress.

School leaders, some of whom are new to their roles, have started to make improvements. However, these plans are very new and are yet to have an impact. Although senior leaders have the ability, capacity in leadership is limited and there is a huge amount of work to do.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have created curriculum plans that map out the knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn across the school in some subjects. This helps staff to know what to teach and when to teach it. However, some staff do not have the required subject knowledge to plan and deliver curriculum plans effectively. In other subjects, leaders have not thought about the order of learning. In these instances, well-ordered curriculum plans are not in place and pupils' learning is disjointed. Some subject leaders do not have the required subject knowledge and leadership skills to develop their subjects effectively.

Staff make regular checks on pupils' phonic ability on the primary site. Staff follow a plan to support the order of phonics teaching. Pupils say they enjoy reading. However, not all staff teach phonics well. Pupils' reading books are not always matched to their phonic ability. As a result, pupils struggle with their reading and fall further behind. Some secondary pupils are at the early stages of reading. However, there is not an early reading curriculum in place to fill gaps in pupils' phonic knowledge. Hence, these pupils continue to struggle with their reading.

Staff do not manage behaviour consistently well on the secondary site. There is not a commonly understood behaviour policy. Rules are not clear, neither are rewards and sanctions. Secondary pupils say they want to 'know where they stand' in relation to behaviour.

Positive relationships between staff and pupils are evident. However, there is not a whole-school approach to supporting pupils' personal development. This is especially evident on the secondary site. The relationships and sex education (RSE) policy and curriculum are not fit for purpose. Pupils are not well prepared for entering into healthy relationships, which puts them at potential risk. Careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) does not meet pupils' needs. Pupils are unclear and uncertain about what they will do when they leave school. Pupils have a limited understanding of healthy lifestyles, including mental health and well-being. In contrast, on the primary site, pupils learn to develop resilience and coping strategies and learn how to manage their feelings. Pupil voice and leadership opportunities are limited.

The majority of staff are proud to work at the school. They are optimistic about the recent leadership changes and the improvements that they hope these will bring. However, some staff say that workload is not manageable. Currently, there are several staff vacancies and high levels of staff absence. This puts pressure on the remaining staff and stretches them to the limit.

School leaders, supported by the proposed interim executive board and the local authority, have started to make changes to improve the quality of education and care that pupils receive. For example, on the secondary site, a revised model of teaching has been introduced for Years 8 and 9. Leaders hope that pupils will develop closer relationships with a smaller number of staff, which will in turn support their behaviour and learning. However, this approach is very new, and is yet to have an impact.

Leaders and those responsible for governance may not appoint early careers teachers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Some pupils attend school on a rota system. This limits the school's ability to check on pupils' safety. It also has a negative impact on their education. On the secondary site, pupils gave examples of when they do not feel safe. This is often linked to the extreme behaviour of other pupils.

Leaders have organised regular safeguarding training for all staff. As a result, staff know what to do if they have a concern about a pupil's welfare. Systems are in place so that any safeguarding concerns can be recorded and acted upon immediately.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- On the secondary site, leaders and staff are not meeting pupils' SEMH needs. Consequently, pupils lose interest in their learning and become disengaged, and some display challenging behaviour. Leaders need to provide staff with the training and support they need, so that they are able to meet pupils' SEMH needs.
- Leaders are in the early stages of developing their curriculum areas in some subjects. Some subject leaders do not have the required subject knowledge and leadership skills to do this effectively. As a result, well-ordered curriculum plans are not in place. Senior leaders need to provide subject leaders with appropriate support so they can develop well-sequenced curriculum plans in their subject.
- Staff do not have secure subject knowledge in some curriculum areas. They do not deliver the curriculum effectively. Leaders need to provide staff with the training and support they need so they can teach the curriculum effectively in all subjects.
- Some staff do not teach phonics consistently well for pupils at the early stages of reading. Pupils' reading books are not well matched to their phonic ability. As a result, pupils fall behind with their reading. Leaders need to provide all staff with the relevant training so they can deliver the phonics curriculum effectively and match reading books to pupils' phonic ability.
- There is not a clear and consistent approach to behaviour management on the secondary site. Staff do not address incidents of negative behaviour and bullying effectively. Consequently, incidents of bullying reoccur and behaviour incidents escalate and get out of control. Leaders need to implement a clear behaviour policy that staff and pupils understand and follow.
- Although the new leadership team is bringing about changes, currently there is insufficient capacity in the leadership team. Leaders cannot implement improvement plans effectively. Senior leaders need to arrange support and training for leaders at all levels, so that leadership tasks can be shared to secure future improvements.
- Some pupils attend school on a rota system. This limits the ability of leaders to check on pupils' safety and has a negative impact on pupils' education. As a matter of urgency, leaders need to fill staff vacancies to increase levels of staffing in the school.
- Pupils, especially those who attend the secondary site, are following a narrow curriculum. The RSE curriculum does not support pupils' understanding of healthy relationships. CEIAG does not prepare pupils for the next stage of their education or employment and training. Leaders need to broaden the curriculum beyond the academic aspect to support pupils' personal development.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	124498
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10216094
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	3 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	116
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Jim Kane
Acting headteacher	Ron Hall
Website	www.portlandschool.net
Date of previous inspection	26 January 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Portland School and Specialist College is based in two separate sites. The secondary site is based in Blythe Bridge. The secondary site caters for pupils from Year 8 to Year 11. The primary site caters for pupils from Year 1 to Year 7. The address of the primary site is Newcastle Road, Trent Vale, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 6NS.
- Although the school has an age range from 3 to 16, it does not admit pupils below statutory school age.
- All pupils on roll have an education, health and care plan. The school caters predominantly for pupils with SEMH needs.
- Pupils attending the school predominantly come from Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire local authorities.
- The acting headteacher has been in post since July 2021.
- The school uses unregistered alternative provision.
- An interim executive board is in the process of being set up.

- The school does not meet the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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.

- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken this into account in the evaluation.
- Inspectors visited the primary site on day two of the inspection. It was closed due to heating problems on day one.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the acting headteacher.
- The lead inspector met with two members of the proposed interim executive board, including the chair.
- The lead inspector also spoke with a representative of the local authority, who is also a member of the interim executive board.
- Inspectors held meetings with the safeguarding team, the special educational needs coordinator of the primary site, and other leaders.
- As part of the inspection, the inspectors focused mainly on early reading, English, mathematics and art. They met with subject leaders and teachers to talk about the quality of education in these subjects.
- Inspectors made visits to classrooms. Most of these visits were with leaders.
- An inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- An inspector visited one of the unregistered alternative providers that the school uses. The inspector spoke with a member of staff from the other unregistered alternative provider.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils formally and informally about their learning and experiences at school. They looked at pupils' work to see how well staff implement the curriculum.
- Safeguarding documents were checked, including the checks that leaders make on staff's suitability to work with children. The inspectors checked how well staff implement safeguarding policies and procedures across the school.
- An inspector talked to a small number of parents. Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. The lead inspector considered the free-text responses received during the inspection.

- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted’s staff survey.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school’s self-evaluation, school improvement plan, school policies, curriculum documents, records relating to special educational needs and/or disabilities and published information about pupils’ performance.
- The inspectors looked at information published on the school’s website.

Inspection team

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