

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231  
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Joanne McKinney  
Headteacher  
Portland School and Specialist College  
Uttoxeter Road  
Blythe Bridge  
Stoke-on-Trent  
Staffordshire  
ST11 9JG

Dear Miss McKinney

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Portland School and Specialist College**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 22 and 23 November 2022 on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the second inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in December 2021.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, members of the interim executive board (IEB), representatives of the local authority and the proposed multi-academy trust sponsor actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. I also carried out other activities, such as visits to classrooms and conversations with pupils and staff, and reviewed documents, including curriculum planning. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

**Portland school and specialist college remains inadequate and requires special measures. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.**

**The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.**

The school should take further action to:

- create and implement their own written commissioning arrangements for the use of alternative provision so that what is provided by these placements is tailored more carefully to pupils' individual needs, provided in the timeliest manner, and enables leaders to assure themselves that all pupils get the best outcomes from their time at the alternative provision.

### **The progress made towards the removal of special measures**

Since the last monitoring visit, there has been a significant change in leadership across both the primary and secondary phases of the school. You have now taken on a long-term role as headteacher. This, along with the appointments of heads of school for both primary and secondary, has brought increased stability to the school's leadership. You have successfully established relationships with other schools and specialist curriculum consultants to bring additional support and perspective into the school. These changes have injected the school with a renewed enthusiasm and drive.

You have now established long-term curriculum plans for all subjects. This planning sets out very clearly what pupils should learn and when. In some cases, planning is well sequenced and helps pupils build on what they have learned in previous lessons. However, this is not always the case. At times, it is not easy to see how a sequence of lessons relate to what pupils might have learned in the past. Teachers are beginning to find this curriculum planning helpful in preparing lessons. In most cases, these plans were implemented in the lessons I visited. However, some work remains to be done to ensure that all staff follow the intended curriculum, so pupils do not miss out on crucial learning.

You have now ensured that there are subject leaders for all subjects. Those I spoke to were confident, knowledgeable, and passionate about their subjects. In some cases, there are now processes for how these leaders develop the subject knowledge of other staff. For example, on the secondary site, workshops in mathematics are providing opportunities for all teachers to become more proficient in teaching mathematics. While this is not the case for all subjects, you have plans to develop this more over the coming year.

Reading now has a high profile across the school. In the primary phase, you have established a phonics programme for all pupils, ensuring that all staff are trained. A new reading scheme means that all pupils are now accessing the books that help them develop their reading, comprehension, and a love of books. In secondary, you have started to mirror this provision by creating morning reading sessions for all secondary-age pupils, such as independent reading sessions for more-confident readers, or staff reading to pupils for the less-confident readers. However, there remains work to be done to ensure that those pupils who start in secondary not being able to read well get the swift intervention and focused teaching they need to become confident readers.

Processes for identifying and then meeting the needs of pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs are now stronger. Training for all staff in aspects such as attachment disorder or trauma-informed practice is starting to influence how staff interact with pupils. This, in turn, has had a positive impact on the behaviour of pupils across the school. Conduct in many classes is now much better. In some cases, I saw pupils being encouraged to develop learning behaviours to be more independent and resilient. You have recently started to refine your assessment systems to better understand the precise nature of pupils' SEMH needs. From this, you rightly feel that the support and intervention will become more focused on helping pupils to overcome those needs.

When needed, you have continued to appropriately use alternative provisions for some pupils at the school. These placements have always been carefully selected to offer pupils a specific experience that they might not be able to access at Portland. Experiences such as agriculture and car maintenance are just some examples. In all cases, when I spoke to the providers, they explained that you communicate with them well and regularly visit to ensure that pupils are safe and completing the courses they should be. However, at the moment, there are no clear written commissioning agreements created by the school to hold providers to account. You have identified this as a priority to ensure you comply with the statutory guidance for using the alternative provision and maximise the learning that pupils gain from the placements.

Since the last monitoring visit, you have driven change at the school. Supported by a strong leadership team, you have galvanised the school into a quest for improvement. You know that for some parents, their confidence in the school remains low, but over time more parents are seeing the positive changes for their children. Staff are optimistic about the changes at the school and are proud to be part of the developments. Your current school development plans are precise and well monitored, demonstrating that things are improving swiftly over time. Evidence gathered during the inspection shows that your evaluations are accurate, and the pace of change is considerable. These evaluations rightly say that there is lots of work still to be done to ensure that your curriculum is well implemented across the school.

Members of the IEB share your commitment to and understanding of change. They can accurately explain the actions that have taken place and the impact that has been made. They share your view that things still need to improve considerably. While leaders and members of the IEB have a strong understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the provision at the school, you have not yet established a written school self-evaluation. You have identified that this is a work in progress and are looking to have a written version within the next few weeks.

Since the last graded inspection, safeguarding has continued to develop rapidly. The leadership for safeguarding across both sites has been strengthened further with dedicated safeguarding officers to support the work of the current designated safeguarding lead. You are currently reviewing the safeguarding policy to ensure that it reflects the broad range of needs of the pupils and the resulting expectations on all staff. You have reinforced many parts of the physical boundaries of the school, meaning that

pupils are now far less likely to be able to abscond during the day. There are plans to continue this work over the next few months, with funding already agreed. Pupils are starting to attend more often. You know that too many are still not attending enough. The expectation is high that all participate full time, and the use of part-time timetables is reducing quickly over time.

When needed, you have commissioned support from external advisers and consultants. In all cases, you have worked in partnership with these consultants to focus on the areas for development from that last graded inspection. Consequently, you feel that their input has helped you develop a high expectations of what the curriculum will look like and the skill and knowledge of leaders and managers.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Pollitt  
**His Majesty's Inspector**