

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Portfield School

Parley Lane, Christchurch, Dorset BH23 6BP

Inspection dates:

26 and 27 November 2024

Outcome

Portfield School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Anna Hewitt. This school is part of the charity, Autism Unlimited, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Siun Cranny, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by James Brazier.

What is it like to attend this school?

Through the curriculum, pupils and students in the sixth form at Portfield School develop strong language and communications skills. Employing a breadth of approaches including signing, visual symbols and talk, pupils and students in the sixth form develop the skills to communicate their needs and thoughts well. The school evaluates pupils' strengths and needs carefully to create personalised curriculums that enable most to thrive.

Pupils and sixth-form students are very positive about school. Relationships between pupils and staff are nurturing and supportive. One sixth-form student's comment echoed that of others, 'the staff are like family'. Across the school pupils learn to interact with each other with kindness, respect and friendship. Consequently, there is a calm learning environment.

Therapeutic sessions are closely aligned with pupils' learning. For instance, speech and language therapy supports pupils' communication development well. Pupils learn how to keep themselves physically healthy through daily walks around the school. In addition, pupils participate in a breadth of sports such as paddleboarding and kayaking. In the sixth form, students learn to cook independently. Many help to cook the daily school lunch. Students are immersed in the local community in preparation for adulthood.

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

The school has designed a curriculum that meets the social, emotional, sensory and learning needs of most pupils and sixth-form students. Pupils learn to focus and engage with learning well. Pupils learn about the world around them through stories. For example, pupils learn about different emotions and are supported well to articulate how they feel. Pupils and sixth-form students learn a well-designed relationships, sex and health education programme. They learn about consent and how to keep physically and mentally healthy. This prepares them very well for their future adult lives.

The school prioritises reading. Staff are knowledgeable about supporting pupils and enable them to read with fluency and understanding. Pupils who struggle are given bespoke support. Pupils and sixth-form students enjoy reading and engage well. The English curriculum supports some pupils to deepen their knowledge of texts. Through personalised approaches, some pupils strengthen their writing skills. For example, some sixth-form students were observed practising their letter and word formation while others were writing recipes for 'revolting meals'. However, for a small number of pupils and sixth-form students who have strong literacy and numeracy skills, the curriculum is not sufficiently broad and challenging. They do not have opportunities to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in a range of subject areas.

The school has a robust, evidence informed approach to managing pupils' behaviour. Using detailed information about each pupil, the school has established personalised approaches which develop pupils' emotional self-regulation. Staff have high expectations for developing pupils' social interactions. Consequently, pupils know the routines of the school and are eager to learn. Similarly, through bespoke approaches, attendance issues are resolved effectively.

Pupils and students in sixth form follow a well-structured careers programme. For example, some pupils learn the profession of a barista. They apply their knowledge of making coffee by working in a café as part of their work experience. Some pupils engage well with the local community as part of their preparation for adulthood. For example, they visit the shops and parks.

The school's vision is clear and shared by staff. Leaders' expertise has informed the development of the curriculum. They acknowledge that for a small proportion of pupils and sixth-forms students, the curriculum requires further development to enable them to flourish. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the support for their workload and well-being. They are also very positive about the ongoing training programme which informs their work. Parents are overwhelmingly effusive about the quality of provision at the school. Trustees and governors have a range of expertise which strengthens the rigour with which they challenge and support the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A small proportion of secondary phase pupils and sixth-form students are ready to learn more challenging curriculum content. However, the school has not developed the curriculum to support the learning needs of this small cohort. Consequently, a small proportion of pupils and sixth-form students do not learn subjects in as much depth or gain the qualifications that they could. The school should ensure that these pupils and sixth-form students study a broad and ambitious subject curriculum so that they are well prepared for their next steps.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in May 2015.

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.

Further information

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

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	113942
Local authority	Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole
Inspection number	10344498
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	119
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	24
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	James Brazier
CEO of the trust	Siun Cranny
Headteacher	Anna Hewitt
Website	www.autism-unlimited.org/education
Date of previous inspection	21 March 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a specialist provider of education for pupils on the autistic spectrum.
- The school has a sixth form centre on a different site.
- The school is a member of the charity, Autism Unlimited.
- The school uses three unregistered alternative provisions.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, members of the leadership team and governors, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors met with staff to consider their views.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents and carers who responded to the confidential questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. They evaluated the views of staff from the Ofsted online questionnaires.

Inspection team

Susan Aykin, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

David Simons

Ofsted Inspector

Mike Thomas

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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