



Portal House School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119062
LEA Kent
Inspection number 280453
Inspection dates 21 June 2006 to 21 June 2006
Reporting inspector Alan Dobbins AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Sea Street
School category	Non-maintained		St Margaret's-at-Cliffe
Age range of pupils	9 to 13		Dover, Kent CT15 6SS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01304 853033
Number on roll	32	Fax number	01304 853526
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	13 March 2000	Headteacher	Mr L Sage

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) provides specialist provision for a wide area of Kent that includes the Isle of Sheppey and Maidstone in the north, Canterbury and Ashford in the middle and the coastal fringe from Folkestone to Sittingbourne. All pupils travel to and from the school on transport provided by the local authority (LA). For some this involves a journey of more than one hour each way. All have statements of special educational needs and almost all the pupils are White British. Since the last inspection the school has been re-designated as a secondary day school for 60 boys and girls with SEBD. The first group of pupils started Year 7 in September 2005. It is planned that pupils currently in Years 4, 5 and 6 will remain at school and enter Year 7. As part of the re-designation the school is to be relocated to a new site somewhere in east Kent that has yet to be identified.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Portal House School is an outstanding school, which provides excellent value for money. It is too modest in judging its effectiveness, which it believes to be good. Outstanding leadership and management have improved the school since the last inspection despite the uncertainties caused by re-designation as a secondary special school. Pupils feel safe and comfortable at school and, because they learn to control their behaviour and their emotions, respond excellently to outstanding teaching. They make exceptional progress over a curriculum that meets all requirements, including those to do with their development as young people. Nationally derived data shows that pupils achieve outstandingly well against their targets for learning. The school is well aware of its strengths and weaknesses, and its capacity for improvement is outstanding. The school recognises that review processes will have to be built on as the age range of its pupils extends, and has clear plans in place to ensure this.

What the school should do to improve further

- The school currently has no significant areas for further improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The standards pupils attain are broadly average, but this represents excellent progress from their levels on entry to the school. For each of the last three years, Year 6 pupils have exceeded the targets predicted for them during Year 2 sufficiently to place the school within the top 5% of schools nationally. In most subjects, typically, they gain one National Curriculum level for each year at school, a rate greater than that of pupils in most equivalent schools. In the two subjects where the school has gained specialist awards, science and French, the typical annual gains are greater than one National Curriculum level. Pupils do exceedingly well in physical education. Most gain distance, water skills and the challenge awards of the Amateur Swimming Association, as well as other awards that reflect excellent performance in athletics.

Pupils are excited about the progress they make because they know it is much better than at their other schools. Many parents are amazed. One said, 'I cannot believe how well my son is doing. He is reading brilliantly and is helping his older brother who goes to a mainstream school with his mathematics homework.' Last year the progress made by three pupils, in their personal development and their learning, was sufficient for them to return to mainstream settings.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. The excellent relationships they have with staff contribute to them feeling safe at school and they are comfortable when they talk with staff,

even on matters that are difficult for them. Taking part in residential visits provides valuable opportunities to practise the social skills required to get on with new people. The School Council is taken seriously by pupils and helps them learn about the procedures of democracy and the need to be socially responsible. All help pupils gain in self-confidence and make excellent progress toward becoming mature and responsible young people. They attend fully to their learning because of the considerable progress they make in controlling their behaviour. Rarely does inappropriate behaviour limit learning and some pupils, for the first time, say they really enjoy working hard to do their best. Through well established links and a programme of visits, they find out about the lifestyles of children in other countries, especially those in Belgium, France, South Africa and Thailand.

The school is a Healthy School. Pupils are routinely encouraged to take part in physical activity and when at school they eat healthily. The outstanding progress they make in their basic skills prepares them extremely well for their future economic well-being. The school is well respected locally, in part because of the way in which it opens its doors to older folk in the community, especially at Christmas. Attendance is good, even for those who travel the greatest distances.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. This is because class sizes are small and teachers and their assistants are quick to provide pupils with help and encouragement. Most lessons are taught by teachers with specialist knowledge and are based on very good long and medium term planning. Teachers and their assistants know the pupils very well. Classrooms are spacious and attractive places for teaching and learning and teachers are expert at using computers to aid learning. All subjects are resourced well and the rooms for art and design, design and technology, science and music contain a very good range of specialist equipment.

Behaviour is exemplary. The excellent relationships pupils have with staff help them to be confident learners who are unafraid of making a mistake and always eager to try out new equipment and new ways of learning. In many lessons, pupils are given responsibility for their own learning, for example when they measure the resistance of a circuit in a science lesson. They enjoy this and try hard to do their best because learning is often fun and rewarding. Careful planning involving the very good use of resources, especially the interactive whiteboards and pupils' own computers, helps all pupils make equivalent progress, irrespective of the cause or level of their learning difficulties.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum for the primary aged pupils is very well established and is outstanding. It is broad, well balanced and closely matches with pupils' learning and other needs. It meets all National Curriculum requirements and is extended by meaningful additional opportunities, such as learning French and taking part in the excellent programme of residential visits. The experiences pupils gain on the activity residentials, and especially when they visit France and Belgium to join with pupils from their link schools, hasten their development as young people and enrich their learning. More time is allocated to physical education than is often the case. This is used well in developing skills in many sports and games and in having pupils recognise the importance of being active as part of a healthy lifestyle.

Pupils' additional needs are met well. Meetings with specialists from many agencies as well as those from education, such as the educational psychologist, are arranged according to need, although many meetings, for example with those from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), tend to take place at the specialist location and not at the school. This means that pupils lose learning time travelling to and from the school.

The Year 7 curriculum is developing very well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding and the procedures for child protection are robust. Risk assessments for lessons, visits off site, and for individual pupils are carried out very well. Health and safety checks are rigorous. Pupils are eager to say how the staff are quick to give them help and advice. Statutory requirements that relate to statements of special educational needs are met. Attendance is monitored very effectively.

A primary focus of the work of the school is to improve behaviour. The very well thought out procedures are applied consistently by all staff and are seen as meaningful by pupils. The tracking system is detailed and gives an accurate judgement of pupils' improving behaviour against their specific targets. The targets for learning work equally well and assessment is closely linked to the levels of the National Curriculum. This means that pupils are able to recognise the progress they make, and this motivates them to do even better. In order to meet the needs of pupils over all the secondary years, which is the ongoing challenge since re-designation, links need to be formed with other professionals, especially those who help prepare pupils to continue their learning after they leave school and for the world of work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Since the last inspection, outstanding leadership and management have helped improve the school despite many enforced changes and the challenge of being re-designated as a secondary school, ultimately at a new location. Pupils are making better progress over a wider curriculum and the school has gained a number of prestigious awards, including Investors in People, Healthy Schools, the European Award for Languages, the Basic Skills Quality Mark and the International Schools award. Day-to-day the school is calm and organised and pupils know that they are expected to do their best; and that is the expectancy for staff also. The national information on the value added to pupils' progress indicates that both groups are achieving this.

The quality of the school's self-evaluation is good. The school is well aware of its strengths and relative weaknesses, although it modestly judges itself to be only good. Many detailed records are kept on the performance of pupils. This information has been used very well in improving the quality of the current provision, but will need to be built on as the age range of the pupils extends.

Governance is outstanding. Governors fully meet their remit to the school. They have ensured that all key issues identified at the last inspection have been resolved. They are doing their best to ensure that re-designation does not disadvantage current pupils or diminish the high quality of the provision. The capacity for continued development is outstanding.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I very much enjoyed my time with you and would like to thank you for talking with me and for helping me find out about your school.

I was very impressed with what I saw at your school. I think that it is among the very best of schools because:

- You make excellent progress in your learning and in becoming responsible and mature young people.
- You like being at school and you like the staff very much.
- You behave excellently in lessons and around the school, and are extremely polite in the way in which you deal with each other and with visitors to the school.
- Your headteacher, deputy headteacher, and all staff work very hard to ensure that you are able to do your best at all times. They are outstanding.
- Teaching is excellent and you work as hard in lessons as do your teachers and teaching assistants.
- The many opportunities you have to stay at places, especially in France and Belgium, help you in your learning and, especially, in your development as young people.

I share your opinion and that of your parents and carers. Portal House is an outstanding school.