

Portchester School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113869
Local Authority	Bournemouth
Inspection number	295386
Inspection dates	6-7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Dowgill

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11-16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	923
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Keith Mitchell
Headteacher	C Bradey
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2006
School address	Harewood Avenue Bournemouth BH7 6NZ
Telephone number	01202 309841
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Portchester is an average sized secondary modern school for boys which has had specialist sports college status since 2004. Most boys come from a White British background. The proportion of boys with learning difficulties is broadly in line with the national average and the percentage with a statement of special educational needs is well below average. The school has experienced considerable difficulties in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified and experienced teachers in certain subjects.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Portchester is an improving school that now provides its students with a satisfactory education. In accordance with Section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are fully aware of the areas of the school that require improvement and are realistic in their evaluation of the school's current performance. Since the previous inspection, they have worked hard to change the culture of the school and place student performance at its centre; they have succeeded in this. Strategies to secure sustained improvement have been carefully selected and prioritised. Many of these are still in their infancy but are beginning to have an impact on improving standards and the quality of teaching and learning. Leadership and management are now good and senior leaders and governors are driving forward change with sufficient pace. As yet, not all subject leaders are having enough impact on improving test and examination results.

Students' achievement overall is satisfactory. The standards students attain in both Year 9 and Year 11 are below average and improvement is required, particularly in English and mathematics. Teaching and learning have improved and are now satisfactory. The school's programme of monitoring, support and training has led to a more widespread understanding amongst teachers of what constitutes effective teaching and learning and is leading to improved practice. The use of assessment data to inform planning so that all students' needs are met and greater consistency in high quality day to day marking still require improvement. The school has introduced a rigorous system to monitor students' performance each half term and now has the information it requires to set challenging targets. Students are aware of their targets and what they have to do to achieve them. As a result of this, and better teaching, standards are beginning to improve. The curriculum is satisfactory and meets the needs of most students. There is good provision for a group of Key Stage 4 students through the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness, but the range of other vocational courses is limited.

The personal development and well-being of students is satisfactory overall, although students' understanding of why it is important to be healthy and their contribution to the school community are good. This is reflected in the high uptake of out of school activities. Despite the considerable efforts of the school, attendance remains below average. The care, support and guidance for students have improved since the previous inspection and are good. The new developments, such as half termly target setting and in resolving disputes, are beginning to have a positive impact on students' personal development and performance.

Although not many parents responded to the inspection questionnaire, most of those who did think the school supports their child well, is approachable, and deals with issues swiftly. However, a small minority expressed some concerns about behaviour. The school is aware of both parental and student concerns about behaviour and has recently introduced a new, positive approach to dealing with misbehaviour which many students value. Due to this and the school's focus on developing students' attitudes to learning, student behaviour is satisfactory and improving.

The specialist status in sports has had considerable impact in improving physical education and is beginning to have an influence throughout the school and in the borough. As a specialist sports college, the school has done well with the limited sports facilities available and aspects of specialist status are seen as exemplary by the Youth Sports Trust. The school works well with a range of partners including other schools, the local authority, and bodies such as

Connexions and Young Adults Drug and Alcohol Service (YADAS) to promote students' well-being.

The school has made a number of considerable improvements in a short space of time and all staff are working diligently to ensure that these improvements are embedded and sustained. The capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement and standards in English and mathematics for all students through raising teachers' expectations.
- Use assessment data more effectively in planning to meet the needs of all students.
- Ensure that there is greater consistency in high quality marking so students in all subjects know what they have to do to improve their work.
- Ensure that all subject leaders have as their key priority improving students' performance. A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The progress made by Year 11 students improved significantly in 2006 and, given their starting points, was satisfactory. This resulted in a marked improvement in the percentage achieving 5 A* to C GCSE grades, although it remained below the national average. Students did particularly well in art and history, although progress and standards in mathematics were exceptionally low, and standards in English were below average. The school has put in place a range of initiatives to support students to meet the challenging targets it has set for mathematics this year. Lesson observations, improvements in teaching, intensified support, and rigorous target setting and review all point to most students being on track to meet their targets in all subjects in 2007. Students with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress and the majority are expected to meet their targets.

The standards achieved by students in national tests overall at end of Year 9 in 2006 were below average, although performance varied considerably across the core subjects. In science, the increasing expectations of staff resulted in standards improving considerably to be broadly average. Standards in mathematics, although remaining below average, improved in line with the national trend. In English, standards declined significantly and were exceptionally low. The school fully understands the reasons for this decline and has strategies in place to ensure significant improvement this year so that its targets are met. In mathematics and English teachers' expectations are not high enough so few students attain higher levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is satisfactory. There are many opportunities for students to work in groups and consider the rights of others. The fewer opportunities for spiritual experience results in this being the least secure aspect of their personal development.

Behaviour is satisfactory and has improved recently, although students and a small minority of parents still express justified concerns which relate to the behaviour of a few individuals. The

recent introduction of a restorative approach to resolving conflicts, such as bullying, is beginning to improve many students' attitudes and is resulting in more harmonious relationships.

Most students enjoy school and feel safe. The school works hard in taking all possible actions available to improve students' attendance. Despite this, due to the persistent poor attendance of a small group of students, attendance remains stubbornly below average. Students have a good understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles and the majority take part in some form of out of school sporting activity. They also appreciate the healthy options provided at lunchtimes. Students take on a wide range of school responsibilities and their contributions to the wider community are good. They are positive about rewards and new house system, both of which give them a greater sense of belonging. The school council enables students' concerns to be heard, but students would welcome more feedback about the council's debates and decision making. Students' basic skills have improved, providing them with satisfactory levels of literacy and numeracy to move into working life. Most interact positively with each other and with adults, strengthening this further.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection and overall is satisfactory, although there are pockets of good teaching. Much of this improvement is due to effective monitoring, guidance from senior leaders, and training in helping teachers develop their skills.

Teachers' lesson planning is now more consistent and indicates how they intend to meet the differing needs of students. However, not enough teachers are identifying accurately the learning outcomes for groups of students and matching activities to meet these. In a number of subjects, the available assessment data has yet to sufficiently inform the planning of lessons.

The challenge presented to students in lessons is variable. Too often, despite the planning, students are given the same work to complete, often pitched at the middle ability level. When work is too easy or fails to engage them, a few students quickly become inattentive and disrupt others. Where students are encouraged to think for themselves, are provided with opportunities to work in different groupings, and are presented with a range of activities they respond well and are keen to learn. This style of working was seen most often in the arts and vocational subjects and physical education. Teachers' questioning and evaluation of learning has improved and most teachers return to the objectives they set at the outset and check students' learning against these. The quality of marking remains inconsistent. In some lessons it is good, but often students do not receive specific advice on how well they are doing and what they should do in order to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school is seeking to improve the curriculum so it better meets the needs of all learners. Areas of weakness have been identified and new initiatives put in place. Time allocations for mathematics and English in Key Stage 3 have been adjusted with better use of the content and approaches from national strategies; as yet they have not had an impact on student outcomes. A life skills course, with contributions from visiting speakers, provides students with

opportunities to learn about aspects of personal development, safety and healthy living. In Key Stage 4, a small group of students benefit from accreditation in an alternative course which includes experience of a range of work-related skills. Currently, there are only limited opportunities for most students to gain accreditation in vocational subjects.

A particular strength of the curriculum lies in its extensive programme of out of hours learning clubs. These feature diverse sport and health-related activities, as well as good opportunities to extend learning across a range of academic subjects. This programme is meeting the needs of the students well with high levels of participation. There is also a substantial range of school visits that both support and extend work completed in lessons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support have improved since the last inspection and are now good. However, the new initiatives have not yet had sufficient time to bring about significant improvements to students' personal and academic development, although changes are beginning to happen. The new house system and changing role of heads of year have led to improved support for students and enhanced attitudes to learning. Students are happy to approach members of staff to discuss issues and attention to safeguarding their welfare is robust. New procedures for resolving conflicts openly are starting to be effective, with a significant number of Year 8 students trained as peer mediators. Although tutor time lacks a structured programme, and in some cases is not used well, it does provide good opportunities for staff to discuss pertinent issues with students.

Academic guidance has improved considerably and is a strength of the school. The half termly monitoring of students' performance alongside how they view their learning is providing staff with a clear picture of each student's achievement. Students are set realistic, yet challenging, targets and most are aware of what they have to do to achieve these. Specific support for students with learning difficulties and monitoring their progress has recently improved. The regular monitoring, along with the awarding of house points and other rewards, is motivating students to improve their performance. Students receive good guidance about the pathways available at Year 9 and beyond Year 11 and good numbers stay on in education after leaving school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school have improved significantly since the last inspection. The school uses data well to monitor the progress of each student, class, subject, and year group. It has recently started to use this information to understand the relative performance of different groups of students, such as those with learning difficulties. This has led to more effective interventions to support learners in ways that are beginning to raise their achievement. Senior leaders rigorously evaluate teachers' performance and visit lessons frequently making accurate judgements about teaching and learning. As a result, they have a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. On the basis of this, senior leaders are successfully taking action to deal with areas of weakness, for example, in the teaching of English and mathematics.

Senior leaders have built a consensus amongst staff about the central importance of improving all students' achievement. Leaders of certain subject areas, such as science, are effective in securing good outcomes for their students. Leadership is improving in English and mathematics but the school recognises that further professional development is needed to sharpen the way these subjects are led and managed. The specialist sports status is having an increasingly constructive impact upon the school through, for example, key staff disseminating good practice in assessment and the building of positive attitudes among the students. The priorities in the school improvement plan are well judged, although some of the specific targets are too high to be realistic in the shorter term.

The governors, very ably led by the chair, have played a significant role in securing the improvement of the school. Alongside senior leaders, governors have worked hard to recruit good quality staff to key posts. They hold senior leaders to account for their actions and are supportive in seeing through agreed decisions. The school marshals its resources well and in January 2007 demonstrated this by meeting the Financial Management Standard in Schools set by the Department for Education and Skills.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

8 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Portchester School, Harewood Avenue, Bournemouth BH7 6NZ

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you for your positive contribution during the recent inspection. We enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views. This letter is to inform you of what we found.

Portchester is an improving school and is providing you with a satisfactory education. This is considerable improvement compared to the last inspection. The school is well led and senior staff have worked with your teachers to bring about a number of good changes. As a result, the teaching has improved and because of this you are now making satisfactory progress. We think you can still do better and the half termly target setting and focus on your attitudes to learning will help in this. Many of you are concerned about behaviour, which we thought was satisfactory but could be better. This is one area which you can quickly change by enjoying school, focusing on your work and respecting the rights of others. The curriculum meets most of your needs and one very positive feature of this is your participation in out of school activities, if you are not involved in these you should be! A small minority of you still insist in missing too much school – to be successful you need to attend as regularly as possible. The teachers provide you with good support and guidance which most of you appreciate and this helps in your personal development. You would like more feedback from the school council about what is happening in school.

The senior staff, governors and teachers know that there is still much to do to improve the school further and we believe that with your help they can achieve this. We have asked them to focus on the following areas.

- Improve your achievement and standards in English and mathematics by raising your teachers' expectations.
- Use assessment data more effectively in planning to meet your needs.
- Ensure that when teachers mark your work they make it clear what you have to do to improve.
- Ensure that all subject leaders have a clear focus on improving your performance in examinations.

We wish you all the best of luck in the future. Yours sincerely

Paul Dowgill Lead inspector