

# Portland Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	105037
<b>Local Authority</b>	Wirral
<b>Inspection number</b>	308749
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 July 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Graham Martin

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	224
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Kathy Smith
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Mary Walker
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 September 2004
<b>School address</b>	Laird Street Claughton Birkenhead Merseyside CH41 0AB
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 6525124
<b>Fax number</b>	0151 6533271

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Portland Primary is an average sized school. It serves an area of high unemployment with associated socio-economic disadvantage. Three quarters of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is much higher than the national average. Nearly a third of pupils have some form of learning difficulty and/or disability, which is also higher than the national average. The school has achieved a number of nationally recognised awards, including the Activemark and Healthy Schools awards, as well as the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark. It also holds a number of locally significant awards, including Drop into Gardening, Children's Eco-Schools Parliament and the local authority's Accreditation of Self-Evaluation.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school. It has a strong and successful focus on improving pupils' achievement and raising standards. Self-evaluation is used well by the good, strong leadership of the school to identify and respond to what needs improving. Parents speak highly of the school. They value the care the school provides and recognise that it is giving their children good opportunities and aspirations. 'I feel my child's abilities have been recognised and he receives the stimulation he craves' is a typical comment, as is, 'The enthusiasm and commitment of staff is fantastic: they are approachable and deal with any concerns.'

All pupils achieve well. They understand how the school's good partnership with parents and carers adds value to their achievement. Standards are broadly average at the end of both key stages, reflecting good progress from children's well below average starting points on entry to Nursery. Disappointing Year 2 assessment results in 2007 caused the school to take determined and effective remedial action. This resulted in a noticeable improvement in the current Year 2 pupils' standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The 2007 Year 6 test results provide evidence of the very good achievement made in Key Stage 2. The good progress, seen in the oldest pupils' standards this year, is a reflection of the consistently good quality of teaching. Teachers have high expectations and provide lessons that keep pupils on task. As a result, pupils show interest in learning and enjoy the challenges their teachers provide because the activities are well matched to their learning needs. In most classes, very good use of teaching assistants enhances the work of teachers, adding good value to pupils' learning. Teachers make unfailingly good use of marking in English to improve pupils' writing, but this quality of marking is not yet consistently good across all subjects, particularly mathematics.

The behaviour of pupils is good. They follow the school's rules well because they have suggested and agreed them collectively. Attendance is satisfactory. Effective action taken to reduce absences among a minority of pupils is reflected in the school exceeding its agreed attendance target for the current year. Pupils' personal and social development is good. Good care for their social and emotional needs and the respect shown to them by the staff ensure that pupils develop positive relationships. Consequently, the school is largely free from conflict or bullying. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of how to keep safe and live healthily.

Pupils enjoy good learning opportunities. The good curriculum is managed well to meet their interests and provide them effectively with the essential basic skills of numeracy and literacy. Furthermore, it is enriched with a good range of interesting and stimulating sports and arts activities and visits that broadens pupils' horizons and aspirations, helping them to see how their skills can be applied in different subjects.

The school is led well. Staff teamwork is good, focused on ensuring that the social, emotional and learning needs of pupils are consistently well met. Staff are hard working and have the confidence of parents and pupils, giving the school good credibility in the community. School leaders have a good clear vision that is reflected in all aspects of their work to the benefit of pupils and the community as a whole. Beneficial links with local and national partners and the good support and challenge of governors enable the school to achieve good value for money. Effective steps have been taken since the last inspection to promote improvement. This and the clear evidence of rising standards, partially due to the school's outstanding use of challenging targets, give the school a good capacity to improve.

## **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

When they arrive in the Nursery class most children have skills well below those expected nationally. Through good quality teaching they move on with their learning at a good pace. By the start of Year 1 a small number are working at the levels expected for their age but most are still working towards them. Thorough induction arrangements, appreciated by parents, help the children to settle quickly into the Nursery class. They make good friends, work well together and treat each other and adults with respect. They become happy, independent learners, willing to talk about their activities and to ask for help, for example, when trying to write their name on a piece of work. Teachers are enthusiastic and eager to improve the provision. This is seen in the work begun on a partnership project to improve children's speaking and listening skills. This reflects the impact of the good leadership on the work of the Foundation Stage. Steps are also being taken to promote continuity of the Foundation Stage curriculum into Year 1 for those children who still need to learn at this level. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this work but staff are clearly committed to its principles. Good teamwork with teaching assistants and good procedures for the care and welfare of the children ensure that they are safe and well looked after. Teachers' planning and careful assessments take account of individual needs and all the areas of learning are covered. The interesting indoor areas provide a relevant and appropriate focus on personal development and basic skills, as well as the wider curriculum. The outside areas provide similar levels of challenge and stimulation although the children's independence is less well developed in these areas because their use is restricted through the lack of free flow access from either classroom.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that the quality of marking of pupils' work is consistently as good in mathematics as it is in English.
- Improve children's access to outdoor learning areas in the Foundation Stage.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Standards at the end of Years 2 and 6 are broadly average. These standards represent good achievement from most children's well below average starting points. Pupils achieve well in both key stages. Improvement to Year 2 pupils' standards in reading, writing and mathematics is seen in recent assessments of current Year 2 pupils at the end of Key Stage 1. The achievement of the Year 6 pupils in 2007 was very good. Provisional assessments of the current Year 6 pupils show that they have largely met and in some cases exceeded the challenging targets set by the school's governors, further evidence that achievement is good. Increasing proportions of pupils are reaching the higher Level 5 in Year 6 English, mathematics and science tests. These assessments show a trend of rising standards and reflect the school's strong commitment to ensuring that all pupils achieve well, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' good personal development is seen in their increasingly positive relationships as they pass through the school. Their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. Pupils are keen to say how much they enjoy school. They have good attitudes to learning, as reflected

in their interest in the activities provided. They are keen to celebrate the positive impact their teachers have on their life in school and beyond. They adopt safe practices, as seen in their sensible and mature behaviour in and around the school. Pupils make good progress in academic and collaborative skills from a low starting point, working well together on team activities. Attendance is satisfactory and improving. A strong emphasis on children's personal and social development in the Foundation Stage sets the benchmark for pupils' future growth in this area, helping them to form good relationships and learning skills. Pupils show good awareness of the importance of healthy eating and exercise. They make a good contribution to the development of their school through an enthusiastic and active school council.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are of a consistently good quality. Teachers are enthusiastic and confident. The variety of activities within lessons keeps the vast majority of pupils engaged in their learning throughout. Pupils are well behaved and work keenly on the tasks they are set. Pupils are effectively assessed and this informs both the content of lessons and the use of support. The generally very good use of teaching assistants enhances the work of teachers, though on rare occasions assistants are not used to the best effect in lessons. Pupils are well aware of their learning targets and are able to speak clearly of what is expected of them, especially in English. Work to ensure that marking in mathematics is consistently as good as that in English has not yet been implemented. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well organised. Good links with parents ensure that there is an effective partnership to benefit all pupils, including those who find learning challenging. Gifted and talented pupils are also well catered for in academic subjects, as a result of which the progress of higher ability pupils is improving and standards are rising.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school has taken good steps to strengthen its curriculum by linking the development of skills across subjects. Good commitment to a national programme to improve writing skills has assisted this work. Pupils understand the relevance of their learning and how it can be applied in other areas of their work. They are given good opportunities to develop and practise their key English and mathematics skills in a range of subjects. Good evidence of this was seen in topic work where, for example, pupils wrote persuasive letters to express their concerns about the lack of recycling facilities in their community. A range of sports and arts activities and wider opportunities, such as the popular residential visit to Bala, brings further enrichment to the curriculum. Pupils enjoy these and attend them well. Key Stage 2 pupils also say how much they enjoy learning French. Adaptations to the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well thought out, enabling these pupils to enjoy full access to learning. This demonstrates the school's good, strong commitment to equality of opportunity.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school takes good care of its pupils. Their health, safety and well-being are scrupulously attended to. There are good systems for dealing with the small number of incidents of conflict

between pupils. Child protection procedures meet statutory requirements. Risk assessments are rigorous and up to date. Assessment of pupils' progress is meticulous and very well used. Early identification of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is efficient and effective, as a result of which they make good progress. The school works well with outside agencies, as is demonstrated in its strong links with the extended schools partnership. It is well supported by parents who say they have confidence in the care the school gives their children. Beneficial links with secondary schools are well established. Provision for the teaching of healthy lifestyles is good.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher and leadership team share high aspirations for the school, its pupils and the community. Good management of resources to obtain best value helps to achieve these objectives. The staff team works well to take the right action to bring about improvement, ensuring good capacity for improvement. Exceptionally effective use of assessment to identify the action needed to improve achievement is a good example of this. Leadership roles are shared well and there is carefully planned use of each teacher's expertise. Thorough checks on the work of teachers help to raise standards, although checks on the impact of the work of teaching assistants are not yet implemented well enough. Wider partnerships, including positive links with local high schools, the local authority and the wider community support the drive for improvement well. Good school self-evaluation accurately provides leaders with a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school improvement plan focuses clearly on the steps needed to build on recent success. The governing body works well with the school, giving it much valued challenge and support. Staff are happy to strive for improvement, feeling their hard work is appreciated by parents and governors who overwhelmingly share their aspirations for the school's success and its status in the community.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

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

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	2

### The quality of provision

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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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**

Inspection of Portland Primary School, Birkenhead, CH41 0AB

You may remember that two inspectors inspected your school a little while ago. We promised to tell you what we found out. Your Year 6 school councillors also promised to read this letter out to you. Before I tell you what we found, we would like to say thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the school inspectors and the polite and friendly way you shared your thoughts with us.

We agree with you, your parents and carers that you attend a good school. The school council and other pupils we talked to were great ambassadors for Portland School, speaking honestly about their views. We were impressed with how proud you are of your school and how keen you are to make it even more successful and respected. We were also pleased with how well you behave in lessons and around school. It was good to see how well you enjoy learning. You told us this is because the teachers work hard to make lessons fun and interesting. We agree with that too. We were pleased to see how this helps you all to achieve well and reach broadly average standards. We also agree with your view that you are well cared for. You are fortunate to have teachers who give you good support for your personal development. This shows in how well you care for one another and how much you know about healthy living and keeping safe.

Your headteacher and teachers help you to ensure that Portland School is a welcoming and friendly school. They have the right plans to keep improving your school but it would be even better if they could make sure that the Nursery and Reception children can move between their indoor and outdoor areas more easily. We also think it would help you all to do better in mathematics if the teachers mark your numeracy work as well as they do your English.

Having met with you and enjoyed talking with you we are sure that you will play your part in helping your school to get better still by working hard and keeping up your good standard of behaviour. It was delightful to meet you and we wish you all every success for the future.

Thank you once again, and best wishes for the future.