

# The Purbeck School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113855
<b>Local Authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	325902
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 May 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Robin Gaff

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>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	13–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1170
Sixth form	240
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Giles Sturdy
<b>Headteacher</b>	Richard Holman
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 March 2006
<b>School address</b>	Worgret Road Wareham BH20 4PF
<b>Telephone number</b>	01929 556301
<b>Fax number</b>	01929 554025

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

## Description of the school

The Purbeck School is a larger than average school. The great majority of its students are of White British heritage. Most students travel to the school from the surrounding rural area. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is smaller than the national average. The school gained specialist status as a science college in September 2004 and is a member of the local extended schools and sports partnerships. It holds a number of national awards, including Artsmark and Healthy School status, which it gained in 2007 and 2008 respectively.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

The Purbeck is a good school. It now has a number of outstanding features. These include the care, guidance and support which it provides for its students, and its extensive network of partnerships that enhance the school's curriculum and also benefit the wider community. The school's leaders and managers have worked systematically to eliminate the weaknesses identified by the previous inspection, resulting in a significant and largely sustained improvement in its performance.

Academic achievement is good. Students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress throughout the school. Standards, including success rates at GCSE and equivalent courses, have risen steadily in recent years as a result of the school's rigorous and successful focus on improving teaching and learning. Teaching overall is good, and some of it is outstanding. Teachers mostly plan their lessons well to include activities which engage and sustain students' interest. Students learn less well when teachers do not provide them with enough opportunities to become involved in lessons, with the result that a few become bored or disengaged. Day-to-day marking does not always give students sufficient information about what they need to do next to improve their work. The school has a clear focus on helping all students to reach their full potential academically and personally, and this is reflected in the curriculum, which provides a good match to students' interests and abilities.

Students show a good level of commitment towards adopting a healthy lifestyle, for example through their extensive and enthusiastic participation in sporting activities, benefiting from the school's close collaboration with the adjacent sports centre. They feel that the school is a very safe place where bullying or racist incidents rarely occur and are dealt with effectively when they do. They enjoy school, particularly when lessons challenge them to think, and to learn by interacting with one another. Many students make a good contribution to the school and the wider community, by organising social and charity fundraising events, and through their active participation in local environmental projects. They are well prepared for their future economic well-being because they receive good advice about careers and further study, and benefit from a good range of opportunities for work-related learning.

This is a school where the staff focus strongly on caring for and supporting students as individuals. Parents comment very favourably on how well their children have been helped to make a successful transition from middle school, and on the school's prompt response to problems that occur. The school's highly effective use of information about students' attainment and progress has been a major factor in raising standards. The school has developed a new system of rewards and sanctions which is having a positive impact on students' behaviour. Students are courteous to visitors, and treat the school's buildings and facilities with respect. The school has worked successfully to reduce the number of persistent absentees, and is beginning to raise the overall level of attendance, which is now satisfactory. The school understands that it must continue and, if necessary, refine its procedures in order to maintain this improvement.

Leaders and managers have succeeded in creating a harmonious and highly inclusive school community, in which individuals, regardless of their background or ability, can thrive. School leaders, working closely with the governing body, have a clear vision and strategy for further development. Governors play a key role in shaping this strategy and in holding the leadership team to account for the school's performance.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

The proportion of the school's students who choose to stay on in the school's sixth form is increasing. Students begin their courses with standards that are a little below the average compared with those attained by sixth form students elsewhere. They make good progress and their standards in A and AS level examinations are in line with national averages. Sixth form students make an outstanding contribution to the school community through their mentoring of younger students as well as voluntary work with elderly people and the emergency services. They can choose from a good range of traditional and applied courses, and the school regularly reviews and revises the sixth form curriculum to respond to students' preferences. Students value the extremely strong care and guidance they receive in the sixth form, and speak highly of the improved learning environment that gives them good access to information and communication technology (ICT) facilities. They gain a very good understanding of possible future pathways from the specialist advice they receive and the school's close links with local universities. Teachers use their subject expertise well to motivate students and to prepare them well for public examinations. Sixth form leaders accurately evaluate the provision, and are committed to enhancing it further.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning still further by ensuring greater consistency in the use of methods that engage students, and in marking their work to ensure students know what to do to improve.
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of the school's work to reduce absence, in order to ensure that improvements in attendance are sustained.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Standards at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form are broadly in line with national averages. In 2008, students' attainment at GCSE was average in terms of the proportion who gained five A\* to C grades, and five A\* to C grades including English and mathematics. There was some variation between subjects, with above average results in English and physical education (PE), but also relative underperformance in some areas, including art and business studies. It is clear from the results of modular tests as well as the data provided by the school's own highly sophisticated and robust systems for tracking students' attainment that weaknesses have been successfully addressed. Current Year 11 students are on course to gain results which will represent a significant improvement on those of 2008. Students' standards of attainment at the beginning of Year 7 are slightly below the national average. A significant proportion of students join the school with weak literacy skills. Students' achievement is good because, by the end of Key Stage 4, they reach standards in line with, and in some cases above, the national average. This reflects the good or better progress they make in most lessons.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This is demonstrated, for example, by their safe and responsible behaviour. Students' art work displayed around the school shows their appreciation of different cultures around the world. Students settle in quickly

when they join the school. Regular surveys of students' and parents' opinions carried out by the school confirm that the great majority of students enjoy their school experience. Their understanding of the importance of healthy eating is enhanced by projects concerning the components of a balanced diet in mathematics and in PE lessons. Students' excellent understanding of, and response to, potential dangers outside school, as well their good contribution to the wider community, are illustrated by their work as 'bus prefects' on buses serving a number of local schools. Diminishing levels of absence show that students' understanding of the importance of regular attendance is improving. The interpersonal skills they develop, together with the qualifications they gain and their participation in the school's well-run work placement scheme, result in almost all of them being able to continue their education, begin training courses or gain employment.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

In many lessons, teachers plan a good range of activities, as well as opportunities for independent learning and group work. Students enjoy these lessons, take pride in their work, and develop the confidence to participate fully. For example, in an outstanding mathematics lesson, students made excellent progress because the teacher carefully designed activities which interested and met the needs of individuals. She enabled them to gain an understanding of complex processes and concepts by encouraging them to work out and explain their own solutions to problems. Relationships in the classroom are positive and most lessons take place in a calm and productive atmosphere. However, owing to a lack of appropriate challenge in the work, a small minority of students behave immaturely in some lessons, which hinders their own and others' learning. Students say teachers are helpful and approachable, and are willing to give them extra support when they need it. Most students know their current levels of performance and their targets. However, marking does not always include enough detailed written comments to ensure that students know where and why their work has been successful and what they should do to make it even better.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school provides a good variety of academic and vocational courses that correspond to students' needs, as well as those of the regional economy. Students say they welcome in particular the choice of subjects made available to them through the Central Dorset Partnership. They also value the school's enrichment programme, which includes special events, as well as out-of-school activities that enable students to develop sporting, artistic, and subject-related skills. The beneficial impact of the school's specialist status in science is evident in the good range of courses available to students. Cross-curricular projects, for example, linking science and the arts through exploration of the natural environment, make a good contribution to students' understanding of, and appreciation for, the world around them. Students have opportunities to learn about the multicultural nature of modern Britain, but this is less well developed. The school adapts the curriculum well for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that they make good progress, and the needs of the more able are met through, for example, increasing academic specialisation.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 1

The school makes very good arrangements for safeguarding students. It ensures that all staff thoroughly understand child protection procedures, and that risk assessments are fully completed and regularly reviewed. The new strategy to improve behaviour in lessons and around the school is already having a positive effect in terms of ensuring that students know what is expected of them, and in reducing the number of reported incidents. The school excels at promoting equality of opportunity, for example through its creation of an on-site unit to re-engage disenchanted students, and in its success in securing university places for students from all backgrounds. Expert and highly committed staff, including well-trained teaching assistants and volunteers, provide excellent support for vulnerable students, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This helps them to overcome potential barriers to academic success and personal development. The school's use of data to set students' challenging targets, monitor their progress, and enable staff to intervene when students may be at risk of underachieving is outstanding.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

Leaders and managers at all levels, under the purposeful and effective leadership of the headteacher, have a shared ambition for the school's improvement, and the school has set up effective systems to realise this. For example, senior leaders hold fortnightly meetings with subject leaders to discuss progress towards targets and what needs to be done to reach them. The school's ongoing cycles of self-review, which include termly departmental self-evaluations, provide it with an accurate overview of its progress. It has a programme of lesson observations that identify accurately where teaching needs to improve. Initiatives to enhance the quality of teaching are encouraged, and good practice is disseminated through an innovative programme where teachers discuss and share features of successful learning. However, there remain some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.

The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. It is itself a strongly cohesive community, and it provides important benefits to local residents, for example by offering a range of activities outside of school hours for families and children of all ages. Leaders and managers keep community relationships, and the impact they are having on students' progress and well-being, continually under review. At the apex of the school's work is the governing body, which fulfils its role in an exemplary fashion. It is highly supportive of the school and exercises a close oversight of its progress. For example, it closely scrutinises the school's efforts to boost attendance and it agrees the setting of major academic targets. This is a major factor which helps to ensure that the school's capacity to improve still further is good.

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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	16-19
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**Overall effectiveness**

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

**Achievement and standards**

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

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<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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	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	1	
The extent to which 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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

21 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Purbeck School, Wareham BH20 4PF

I am writing, on behalf of the team of inspectors that visited your school recently, to thank you for the warm welcome you gave us, and for the way you helped us to get to know your school.

Yours is a good school. You make good progress during your time there, and you gain qualifications and develop skills that will stand you in good stead later in life. You benefit a great deal from the school's excellent systems for care and guidance because the school has a very clear picture of how well you are doing, and knows which of you need extra support. You enjoy coming to school, which you say is a friendly place where you feel very safe. Most of you behave very well in lessons and around the school, and understand the need for good attendance. However, some of you need to make more of an effort to get to school regularly, and some need to improve their behaviour in lessons so that everyone can concentrate fully on learning. Your high levels of participation in sport show you appreciate the importance of a healthy lifestyle. You make a good contribution to the school and wider community by organising social and charity fundraising events.

Teaching overall is good, and some of it is outstanding. You say your teachers are friendly and helpful, and most but not all lessons give you a good chance to get involved in practical activities which you enjoy. You understand what levels you are reaching in your work, and you know your targets. Some of you are not given enough information by teachers in their marking to help you understand what you need to do to make your work even better. You have a good range of courses to choose from, including the ones offered by the school's partners, and a good range of extra-curricular activities.

The school is led well by the headteacher, his senior staff and the governors, and they are all highly committed to making the school even more successful. To help them do so, we have asked them to focus on the following areas:

- Include more varied activities in some lessons and make sure teachers give you more detailed written advice which will help you to improve your work.
- Make the school's systems for improving attendance even more effective.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Robin Gaff

Lead inspector