

# Portal House School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	119062
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	326937
<b>Inspection date</b>	25 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Sarah Mascal

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>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	48
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Elizabeth Talbot
<b>Headteacher</b>	Rose Bradley
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	21 June 2006
<b>School address</b>	Sea Street St Margaret's-at-Cliffe Dover CT15 6SS
<b>Telephone number</b>	01304 853033
<b>Fax number</b>	01304 853526

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- Whether all pupils are making the progress they should.
- The effectiveness of teaching and the curriculum in meeting the needs of pupils and ensuring pupils know what they have to do to improve.
- The impact of the school's provision for care, guidance and support on pupils' personal development.
- The effectiveness of leadership and management in bringing about improvements and managing change.

Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, discussions with pupils, staff and the chair of governors, school documentation and assessment information. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

This is a small special school for pupils with statements of special educational needs for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Several have additional special needs over and above their emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are a high number of pupils who are in the care of the local authority. At the time of the inspection, there were no girls on the roll of the school. At present, the age range of pupils attending the school is from 11 to 15.

The school has had a change of leadership since the last inspection and the new headteacher took up her substantive post in January 2009.

Whilst the school takes pupils of average to above average ability, many arrive with standards well below those expected nationally. This is a result of pupils' special educational needs and gaps in their education.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Portal House is a good school that successfully supports pupils' learning and enables them to manage their behaviour and improve their social skills. As a result, pupils achieve well and make excellent progress in their personal development. The very effective systems that help pupils to understand the impact of their behaviour on others and the much valued rewards systems support pupils extremely well. A key to the school's success is the high expectations of all staff in terms of pupils' behaviour and, as a result, behaviour is excellent. There is a consistent approach to working with pupils; for example all staff use the points systems effectively, rewarding pupils when they do well. Pupils have a very good understanding of their targets for personal development and know how well they are doing in meeting these. Pupils and parents comment very positively about how much the school has done for them and their views can be summarised by one parent who wrote, 'Portal House is a fantastic school, offering life skills and education to all its pupils'.

Staff's high expectations extend to pupils' academic achievements and, because of this, pupils make good progress in their learning and achieve well. All groups, including pupils in the care of the local authority, achieve equally well. Next year will be the first year that pupils have been entered for GCSEs and the vast majority are taking nine GCSEs. For several, this represents outstanding progress. Standards are broadly average with pupils achieving particularly well in English, information and communication technology (ICT), citizenship and science. The use of academic targets to show pupils how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve is inconsistent. Consequently, pupils' knowledge of how to improve is better in some subjects than in others.

Pupils benefit from good teaching. A particular strength is the very good subject knowledge that many teachers display in lessons. Staff use this well to make lessons interesting through a good range of activities that ensure pupils stay on task. Explanations are clear and questioning used well to ensure pupils understand what is being taught. Staff are particularly good at ensuring that pupils use technical vocabulary and pupils respond well to this. For example, in geography, pupils are confident in using 'pastoral' and 'arable' when talking about farming. Occasionally, opportunities are missed to involve support staff more in activities, for example by recording pupils' responses in English when describing characters from a novel they are reading. Senior managers are aware of this weakness and plans are in place to review the role of support staff and ensure that teachers use them more effectively in supporting learning.

Pupils are proud of their achievements and clearly really like school. This is reflected in their good attendance at school and the fact that they do not want to go to mainstream because, as one said, 'this school is better'. They talk very enthusiastically about all the activities they can do and how this has benefited them. One commented that his legs were a lot more muscular because of all the sport he was now doing! Many have taken up sports out of school, for example sailing. Pupils talk positively about how their school dinners are well balanced and that they can choose salad if they want to. Pupils relate very well to each other within the school community. They consider that behaviour is mostly very good in school and that it is a very safe place to be. They recognise that occasionally there are incidents of inappropriate behaviour but consider that these are managed well by staff. Pupils like the fact that they can talk to staff if they have problems and feel safe and well supported in school. This reflects the good quality care, guidance and support that is in place. For example, pupils have access to a reflexologist whom they know they can talk to and who is proactive in supporting them when

things are not going well for them. The strong links with a number of agencies support pupils' well-being very effectively.

Pupils value the opportunities to attend college, and the good curriculum is providing an effective range of opportunities that meet pupils' needs well. The school is in the process of enhancing work experience placements and opportunities for vocational accreditation for older pupils. The extended curriculum is very strong and the school has established links with schools in France, Belgium, Germany and Thailand. Pupils talk very positively about their trips abroad and how much they enjoy these. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and pupils show a good understanding of life in other countries and different cultures. They talk confidently about how they can bring about change and this is very evident in the influence the school council has within the school. Pupils are developing into sensible, mature young adults who are well prepared for life when they leave school.

The drive and the commitment of the headteacher are ensuring that the school builds on its strengths. There is a strong sense that 'second best is not good enough'. She is well supported by her leadership team and they are a determined group who are keen to bring about improvements. There is a very good understanding of the strengths and areas for development and the leadership team have successfully involved all staff in identifying what needs to be improved. The headteacher has made good use of the data to analyse pupils' progress, and where there have been weaknesses such as in mathematics last year, these have been successfully addressed. A new development plan is being established. Criteria for measuring the success of improvements in the plan are not yet sufficiently precise to enable governors and staff to fully measure the success of strategies to bring about improvement. Governors are supportive and recent new governors are beginning to provide a good level of challenge that is welcomed by the headteacher. The headteacher has been proactive in developing very good links with schools both locally and abroad and is constantly seeking to strengthen the school's contribution to community cohesion. There is a strong sense of teamwork within the school and this, together with the commitment of staff and leaders to provide the best for pupils, ensures that there is good capacity for further improvement.

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

- Improve the use of pupils' targets for learning to ensure that pupils have a clearer understanding of how well they are doing in all subjects, including what they have to do to improve
- Establish clearer success criteria for strategies for improvement in development planning, to assist staff and governors in measuring their success.

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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 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/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>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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
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

## 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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
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	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



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

26 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Portal House School, Dover CT15 6SS

Thank you for making me so welcome during the inspection. I enjoyed the opportunity to talk to you during the day. You were very positive in your comments about the school, as were your parents and carers. The school provides you with a good education and you make good progress in your learning.

Here are some of the most important findings of the inspection report that I thought you might like to know about:

- Teaching is good and teachers have high expectations that you will gain accreditation by the time you leave school.
- You make excellent progress in your personal development and behave extremely well.
- You are very involved in all the sporting activities within the schools and show a very good understanding about how to stay healthy.
- You clearly like school and your attendance at school is good.
- The school is well led by the headteacher and there is a strong commitment amongst the staff to ensure that the school improves further.
- Your school has very good links with other school both locally and abroad, and you clearly enjoy your trips across the Channel.

In order to make the school even better, I have asked staff to do the following:

- Improve the use of your targets for learning to ensure that you have a clearer understanding in all subjects of how well you are doing and what you have to do to improve.
- Establish clear success criteria in plans for what they want to improve in the school so that staff and governors can clearly measure the school's progress.

I wish you all well for the future and hope you will make as good progress against your learning targets as you do your behaviour targets.

Best wishes

Yours faithfully

Sarah Mascall Lead inspector