

# Portfield School

## Independent School

### Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	835/6008
Unique Reference Number	113942
URN for registered childcare and social care	EY296680 SC026914
Inspection number	330253
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2009
Reporting inspector	John Seal HMI
Social care inspector	Brian McQuoid

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended. The inspection of childcare was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006. The inspection of boarding was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE  
T 08456 404040

[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.

## Information about the school

Portfield School is an independent day and residential school for male and female students aged from two to 19 years. It opened in 1971. It is registered for up to 80 children and young people on the autistic spectrum and there are currently 60 on roll. All students have statements of their special educational needs. The school is a modern purpose-built school. Sharing the site are four purpose built 'houses' for residential provision. The school is located near to the town of Christchurch in Dorset. There is a dedicated Foundation stage class which has appropriate outdoor provision and access. During the inspection there was one child on roll. The separate Life Skills Centre is in an adapted Victorian house in Christchurch. It provides further education and training programmes for students aged 14 to 19. Another Victorian house is adapted for additional residential provision. The school is operated by The Wessex Autistic Society. The school's aims are 'to provide education tailored to individuals' skills as well as their needs, and each child's personal curriculum to reflect their ability, not just their disability. In a context of security, enjoyment and respect, prepare young people to enter adulthood equipped to maximise their independence and quality of life and to engage in their communities as active citizens'. The school's educational provision was last inspected in May 2006 and the last Social Care Inspection was in September 2008.

## Evaluation of the school

Portfield School provides good quality education with some outstanding features. Students make good progress academically and outstanding progress in their social, emotional and personal development. This is because of their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The quality of teaching, welfare, health and safety, and the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage and boarding provision are all good. Helpful links between the residential and education staff support students' behaviour and independence effectively.

The headteacher, supported well by her deputy, have provided strong leadership which has enabled the school to make exceptionally good progress since the last inspection in 2006. All but one of the regulatory requirements are now met.

## Quality of education

Curriculum provision is good and there are outstanding features. This is an improvement since the last inspection. It is underpinned by a good curriculum policy and detailed, effective planning from the Early Years through to young adulthood. As a result, all students make good progress. The curriculum is well planned. Students' learning activities are based on the National Curriculum. These activities are augmented well with a very wide range of practical experiences to meet the complex needs of the students. One example of this was the use of students being able to observe live chicks hatching in the school. The requirements of students' statements are well supported and resourced to provide the most appropriate strategies to match students' needs and well supported by their detailed individual education plans (IEPs). The personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) programme is very good. It provides pupils with good opportunities to explore and learn about themselves, their relationships with others and the wider community. This is an improvement from the time of the last inspection

The curriculum of the Life Skills Centre is especially designed to meet the needs of young adults by developing students' independence and helping them become prepared for adult life and coping in the outside world. The core academic curriculum includes numeracy, literacy, information and communication technology (ICT) and communication skills. The curriculum is broadened by the inclusion of other subjects such as music and movement and the creative arts. The Life Skills Centre has good links with other providers and establishments which provide, for example, work experience and college taster courses. Students also make many educational visits to support the curriculum, such as visits to the nearby New Forest and the coast, and they benefit greatly from learning about independent living in the life skills flat. Provision for students' careers advice and support is good and has improved since the last inspection. However, the school recognises there is a need for students to access more accredited courses and gain more qualifications. To enrich the curriculum and broaden students' experiences, a growing number benefit from the school's exemplary practice in liaising with other schools, both special and mainstream. This has enabled students to take part in lessons such as physical education and design and technology.

Teaching is good with outstanding features. From the Early Years Foundation Stage to post 16 education, teachers plan well and this is effectively underpinned by joint work with residential staff. Individual students' information is shared to ensure they are well supported. Very good practical activities with a strong emphasis on appropriate sensory stimulation and good use of resources engage students and sustain their interest and independent learning skills.

Teachers have extensive specialist knowledge and experience of working with autistic students, and this is supplemented effectively by expert professional development and appropriate outside agencies. Outstanding features of the learning activities include the very strong focus on addressing individual students' social and emotional needs. As a result, staff demonstrate exemplary practice in engaging students in their learning and are endlessly flexible in adapting to the sensory, social and emotional requirements and challenges of each individual. In one lesson seen during the inspection, a student was encouraged to lead an exercise session. All students have exemplary opportunities to plan and check their bespoke daily schedules. In addition to individual work, teachers successfully encourage students to work together which contributes well to their social development. The school's assessment processes are detailed and meticulous. There is rich, detailed and relevant information about each student which informs teachers' planning very well. The school's analysis of students' academic information indicates that they make good progress and this can be seen in students' work from the Early Years Foundation Stage through to the post sixteen department. For older students, there is equally good teaching based on nationally accredited schemes and strong focus on life skills.

### Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The residential and education staff plan and work closely and effectively to ensure seamless provision and care. Consequently, students and younger children enjoy their education and many take part and engage well in their learning activities. Behaviour is good. Students are encouraged to work together and learn to take turns and share. Older students have exemplary moral guidance, rights and wrongs are made absolutely clear. The good relationships between staff and students enable many students to manage their own behaviour effectively and this in turn supports others' learning. Attendance is good. Students' cultural development is well supported through a well planned religious education (RE) and relevant visits to places of interest. Students are very well prepared for future economic well-being. There is a special emphasis on preparing older students for life beyond school. For example, they spend one morning session a week in the life skills flat. Here they to decide on their lunchtime menu, make a shopping list, go out and buy the ingredients and cook the meal. Students' contribution to the community is excellent. This includes being given responsibility for buying some resources, researching the best price and buying them for the school. There are also excellent work experience opportunities where they use their ICT skills well. The school provides students with very good opportunities for spiritual development by providing quality time for students to practise relaxation strategies and review their day.

### Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. Students receive good care in all stages of the educational provision and in the residential settings.

Close and well managed overlapping work occurs between care and education staff to the extent that many of the residential staff work in classrooms supporting learning. Recruitment procedures are secure and in line with National Minimum Standards. A central register is in place and the required checks on staff are carried out and recorded well. Students benefit from freshly prepared meals, including a salad bar, to promote healthy eating. There are very many opportunities for exercise and physical activity including horse riding, trampolining and swimming. Students' welfare and health are looked after well by the school nurse, and the school has developed very effective links with external health professionals. Students confirm in their questionnaires that they enjoy school and are happy. The school has generally good health and safety procedures and policies but there are inconsistencies in how it records and analyses its fire alarm logs. This is being rectified. The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

### Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has secure systems in place to make appropriate checks on all staff prior to their appointment to ensure they are suitable to work with children.

### School's premises and accommodation

Both the school site and Life Skills Centre promote a feeling of safety and enable students to learn effectively. The school is purpose-built and has specialist rooms for science, ICT, food technology, and design and technology. There are sensory rooms on both sites and there is a swimming pool. Some classrooms benefit from interactive white boards to support teaching and learning. The Early Years Foundation Stage area has appropriate provision for outdoor play.

### Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides information which is clear, up-to-date and available to parents, prospective parents and to inspectors, Ofsted and the DCSF on request. There is a helpful prospectus and informative website. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

### Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear, written and fair complaints procedure.

### Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years team builds firm foundations for the children's social and educational development. The requirements for welfare are well met. Children make good progress and are ready to engage with much of the early stage of the Key Stage 1 curriculum by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The teaching areas are well defined to support individual and group learning. Resources are thoughtfully organised to aid independence and promote children's confidence. Children are purposefully engaged in the wide range of imaginative activities, well chosen to match their needs and interests. Good partnership with parents and external agencies, such as the speech therapist, ensure that any specific needs are effectively met. A wide range of resources are accessible to the children and discrete work areas in the rooms make good provision for the children to work independently. The children are very well cared for. The provision is well led with a clear vision of its strengths and areas for development. Teaching is good. The staff have a secure understanding of how young children with complex needs learn. They model language and communication skills well and actively encourage speaking and listening and non-verbal communication skills. There is a good balance of teacher-directed activities and those that children are encouraged to choose for themselves. Children's learning and development is rigorously observed and recorded to show the progress they make towards the early learning goals. Teachers know their children very well and support them to make good progress.

## Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The quality of boarding provision is good overall, with a number of outstanding aspects. All but two of the key national minimum standards are met, and several are exceeded. The school's overall management structure operates extremely well. There is clear and effective leadership of the residential provision, and a strong commitment to the continuing development of the service. Residential students receive an exceptionally high standard of individualised care from a skilled, committed, and inspiring group of staff, and benefit from a remarkably integrated approach across the care and education settings. The promotion of equality and diversity at the school is good.

Excellent residential accommodation is provided in four purpose-built boarding houses on the main school site, while four of the older students live in a detached house, a short distance from the school's Life Skills Centre which they attend. All houses provide a safe physical environment and undergo annual health and safety checks. Fire safety logs are maintained in all houses. These show inconsistencies in weekly alarm tests, and in the recording of practice evacuation procedures. All houses are made as homely as possible, and students all have their own rooms which are personalised. Students benefit from access to a wide range of facilities, both on the school site and within the community.

There is outstanding provision for identifying, addressing and reviewing the routine and specific health needs of students. The school's registered nurse oversees their health needs, works very closely with the residential staff, and has excellent working relationships with the local hospital, surgery and pharmacy. Students have annual health assessments and a consultant paediatrician visits monthly to review those with specific health needs.

The school is proactive in ensuring students' health care is delivered by people who have an understanding of autism, and have undertaken specific training in this area. There are effective systems in place for the management and administration of medication.

Systems ensure the welfare of students is extremely well protected. Staff are well trained in child protection and clearly understand the procedures to follow in order to ensure students are protected from harm. Staff have an intimate knowledge of individual students and how they communicate. Students are encouraged to use 'emotion' symbols to indicate how they feel, and staff are extremely good at advocating for students. Excellent staffing levels and comprehensive risk assessments ensure students are well protected against risks presented by fellow students, and from risks associated with activities undertaken within the school or in the community. The school does not employ sanctions, but adopts a positive approach to supporting students' behaviour. Staff are skilled in developing positive behaviours while reducing those which are challenging, and receive invaluable support from the school's behaviour coordinator in this respect. Students clearly make positive developments in relation to their behaviour while at the school.

Students benefit from excellent levels of individual support according to their needs. There is a strong emphasis on maximising a student's ability to be independent, and this is integral to how the residential provision operates on a daily basis. Individual and comprehensive plans for students identify their needs in all aspects of their daily lives, and how these needs are to be addressed. Students are consulted and given choice as much as is possible.

Communication and collaborative working between the care and education staff is outstanding. All staff within each class meet at the end of every half term, and there are multi-disciplinary meetings held for all students each term. Excellent support is provided for residential staff at the school. Newly appointed staff undertake a thorough induction programme and outstanding ongoing training is provided, either in-house or externally.

Clear and effective systems provide for the internal and external monitoring of the school's residential provision. These are carried out by the residential services manager and a representative of the Education and Children's Services Action Team.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ("the Regulations"), with the exception of the one listed below.



The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- Paragraph 3(5): maintain an up to date fire log with sufficient detail to be monitored regularly.

## What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following point for development:

- Continue to develop the opportunities for young adults in order to support their accreditation.
- In the residential setting, maintain an up to date fire log with sufficient detail to be monitored regularly.

## Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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### The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

### Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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### The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?		✓		
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?		✓		
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?		✓		
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?		✓		

### The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision		✓		
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## School details

Name of school	Portfield School
DCSF number	835/6008
Unique reference number	113942
EY URN	EY296680
Type of school	Residential special
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1971
Age range of pupils	2-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 48      Girls: 10      Total: 58
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 2      Girls: 0      Total: 2
Number of boarders	Boys: 23      Girls: 3      Total: 26
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 50      Girls: 10      Total: 60
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 16      Girls: 3      Total: 19
Annual fees (day pupils)	£30,462 – £67,842 (depending on level of support required)
Annual fees (boarders)	Weekly Boarding: £56,622 - £129,157 Termly Boarding: £80,904 - £190,395
Address of school	Parley Lane Christchurch Dorset BH23 6BP
Telephone number	01202 573808
Fax number	01202 580832
Email address	<a href="mailto:janis.rogers@twas.org.uk">janis.rogers@twas.org.uk</a>
Headteacher	Mrs J Rogers
Proprietor	Wessex Autistic Society
Reporting inspector	John Seal HMI
Dates of inspection	6–7 May 2009