

The Polygon School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116624
Local Authority	Southampton
Inspection number	338844
Inspection dates	25–26 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Stuart Charlton

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	46
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Roger Clark
Headteacher	Mrs Anne Hendon-John
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector. The inspector visited 10 lessons, and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff, groups of pupils, parents and representatives of the local authority. The inspector observed the work of the school and scrutinised the improvement plan, minutes of senior management and the governing body meetings, a range of other documentation and nine parent questionnaires.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work and looked in detail at the following:

- The effectiveness of leaders, particularly the governing body, to determine their involvement in embedding ambition and driving improvement, and in ensuring that all students are safe and secure.
- The effectiveness of the school's systems to monitor and evaluate its provision to ensure that the school is doing as well as it can.
- The effectiveness of the school's strategies to improve attendance.
- The effectiveness of the school's systems to set and track challenging academic and personal targets for all pupils to ensure that all make the progress of which they are capable.

Information about the school

The Polygon School provides education for boys aged 11 to 16 who have a statement of special educational need (SEN) related to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Nearly all have additional learning or medical needs. The school is the only one of its type in Southampton and admits all pupils directed to it by the local authority SEN panel. They include in all year groups pupils who join the school during the academic year. Nearly half the pupils are known to the Youth Offending Team and a few are Looked After Children. Most are entitled to free school meals. The majority have missed considerable proportions of their education through absence or exclusion before joining The Polygon School. The vast majority of pupils are of White British origin. A very few are from Mixed White and Black Caribbean or Asian backgrounds and speak English as an additional language. The school holds SAFE School status and the Healthy Schools award. The headteacher returned to the school in September 2009, having been away for most of the 2008/2009 academic year. During her absence, the school was run by a deputy headteacher who retired in July 2009, the senior management team of bursar, two senior teachers and the personalised learning co-ordinator.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The Polygon School provides satisfactory education for its pupils. Safeguarding procedures are excellent and ensure the school is a safe and secure environment in which the vast majority of pupils make significant improvement in their behaviour and self-esteem from a very low base. This enables them to attain qualifications in a range of GCSE and vocational subjects and, if appropriate, alternative nationally recognised English and mathematics accreditation. Through these, many are able to move successfully into further education, training or the world of work. Overall, attendance is broadly average. The school has good systems in place, such as its first-day absence procedures and its rewards system, which are effective in promoting good attendance and encouraging punctuality. The local authority supports the school well by taking appropriate action against the few parents who condone their child's absence. However, the withdrawal of an on-site educational welfare officer part funded by the school and the local authority has impaired the school's efforts to improve attendance. Behaviour is good and parents are pleased with the school and the positive effect it has on their children. This is not just in terms of their academic progress, but in the improvements it makes to their lives at home and outside school. The school's core work of supporting and improving pupils' behaviour and personal development is good. Each individual's personal development needs are carefully considered, so that support is well tailored to meet them.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and establish very good relationships with their pupils. These are the basis of the good guidance and support for pupils' personal development. The school's systems for tracking pupils' progress against the challenging targets which have been set are not sufficiently well developed to provide clear evidence of how well pupils are doing. Teachers plan their lessons conscientiously, but too often this focuses on the subject content that will be delivered rather than on pupils' needs in the subject and how these will be met. In contrast, in an excellent art lesson with a group of Year 10 pupils, each was given a personal development target and also clear targets for the art skills they were expected to gain. This practice is not sufficiently consistent in all lessons to ensure that every pupil makes the progress of which they are capable and many can achieve more in their academic work. The good curriculum has a clear focus on personal development and basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. When pupils enter the school their reading skills are weak. Although these improve through focused support, the school has rightly identified the appointment of a literacy teacher as a priority because the pace of improvement can be quicker to better support the development of pupils' writing skills. During the headteacher's absence the deputy and senior management team were

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effective in maintaining the day-to-day running of the school, but a number of important developments were delayed. The headteacher provides a very clear vision for how the provision should develop and the determination to implement it. She is well supported by her senior management team. Together they have established a stable staffing base with a common sense of purpose and very good teamwork. A clear path for improvement, based on accurate and honest self-evaluation, has been mapped out. The systems for monitoring and evaluating separate aspects of the provision have improved since the last inspection, but the impact of each on the others is not sufficiently clear. For example, the links between pupils' progress and their attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning are not made with sufficient rigour to give a clear picture of each individual's performance as well as that of the school as a whole. The governing body is very supportive of the school. Over the last academic year, however, governors have rightly been focused on discharging their responsibilities for personnel issues. Recent appointments and changes to the sub-committee structure are helping to ensure that they act more effectively as the school's 'critical friend' in terms of raising achievement. The improvements which the school has made on the attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning of the majority of pupils during a period of significant change show that the capacity for further sustained improvement is satisfactory.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they can by:
 - developing and implementing effective systems for tracking their progress
 - using this information in teachers' planning to clearly identify pupils' needs and how these will be met
 - implementing the planned appointment of a literacy teacher.
- Establish more effective links between the systems for monitoring and evaluating separate aspects of the provision so that a clear picture of each individual's performance, as well as that of the school as a whole, can be demonstrated.
- Consult with the local authority to reappoint an on-site education welfare officer to support the school in raising attendance.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Based on the results pupils attained in national examinations over the last two years their attainment has been close to that expected nationally. This represents satisfactory progress for all pupils regardless of their background and ability. The inspection findings show that the present pupils, particularly those in Year 11, are on course to attain at least as well, if not better. Most students have gaps in their knowledge resulting from their erratic attendance patterns at their previous schools. The development of a more rigorous system to identify these gaps and track pupils' progress in addressing them in each subject has been delayed due to the absence of the headteacher. Good teaching was seen in a Year 8 history lesson where students with a wide range of ability were

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each challenged successfully through the staff's knowledge of their needs.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This is based on the high expectations established by all staff and the role models they present to students. A good example was the quiet reflection by all pupils in the school's weekly awards assembly. Students develop a good awareness of healthy lifestyles and this is recognised through the Healthy Schools Award. The development of the school's allotment has made a very important contribution by involving pupils in growing their own food. They learn to keep fit both through timetabled physical education lessons and by participating in out-of-school activities, which involve a high proportion of students. Students have responded very well to the healthy food options available at lunchtime and break. A good number have taken advantage of information about tobacco and drug abuse to change their lifestyle.

Since the last inspection, attendance has improved. The vast majority of pupils make significant gains in their attendance patterns compared with those at their previous schools. They make every effort to manage their own behaviour and to ensure that if they 'have a wobbler' it does not affect the learning of others. The majority of parents are keen to point out that their children's interest in education has been greatly improved so that they now enjoy coming to school. One pupil captured this by explaining that 'I now get up early to get to school where before I wasn't bothered and stayed in bed all day.' Students make a positive contribution to their immediate community through fund-raising activities and peer mentoring. The literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology qualifications they gain, as well as other skills, are a sound preparation for their future economic well-being.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The ability of pupils varies widely between age groups. This requires staff to quickly develop their practice to address the needs of students across such a wide range and they respond well to the challenge. The very good relationships between staff and students are strengthened through individual mentoring and tutorial sessions. During the absence of the headteacher, the systematic monitoring of teaching and learning has not been a priority and, consequently, improvements in the use of assessment have been slower than expected. To address this, the school is reviewing how teachers use the information about students' performance gathered in the end-of-day staff debriefings more effectively in their lesson planning. The school has recognised that the appointment of a literacy teacher will enable more coordinated provision across subjects to further improve pupils' reading and writing skills.

The curriculum has a good balance of academic, vocational and work-related opportunities. The flexibility with which it has been adapted to respond to pupils' needs is a strength. This is clearly shown by the speed with which changes were made to the provision for the present Year 10 when pupils and staff identified deficiencies in the courses being offered by external providers and an enhanced programme in school was implemented. These changes are much appreciated by pupils and contribute significantly to raising their self-esteem. The quality of the curriculum is enhanced well by partnerships with local schools and colleges.

Care, guidance and support are good and are the cornerstone for pupils' personal development. Central to this is the commitment and time that all staff devote to the personal mentoring system which is such an important feature of the provision. Pupils are quick to acknowledge the difference this has made, not just to their performance in school, but in their home lives as well. Many are able to explain the challenges they face and their response in trying to implement the ethos promoted by the school in their life outside. They are given good guidance about careers and opportunities available when they leave school. They are very supportive of the school's reward system for good behaviour, work and attendance. They are quick to acknowledge how much it has helped them to improve.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3

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The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The schools' focus on safeguarding ensures it is exemplary. All pupils have equal opportunities for success in school and for a better, more productive future.

The headteacher's drive and ambition are fundamental to moving the school forward. Although there are good systems to ensure that the school runs effectively on a day-to-day basis as evidenced during her absence, many of the developments in the improvement plan have not been fully implemented. For example, the development of systems to monitor and evaluate performance, particularly pupils' progress, has not moved forward as quickly as the school would have wanted. Consequently, there is a lack of clarity in demonstrating each individual's performance, as well as that of the school as a whole. This adversely affects the governing body in its capacity to provide critical support.

The impact of the school's work on community cohesion is good. It has done excellent work with its immediate community, which has shown concerns about pupils' behaviour, and very good links have been established with neighbouring schools and colleges and with voluntary organisations. Further planned developments, particularly in relation to regional and national aspects of its work, have not been an immediate priority during the recent period of uncertainty. The governing body has carried out a review of its roles and responsibilities in the light of recent experience. Well-thought-out changes have been made in terms of personnel and its sub-committee structure so that it can act more constructively in helping to raise pupils' achievement. The school works well with parents and a wide range of agencies such as the Youth Offending Team, social services and the Community Safety Team to promote pupils' well-being and personal development.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2

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The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Only a small number of parents returned the questionnaire, but the views expressed in these confirm those derived from the school's own parental questionnaires. Almost all parents are completely satisfied with all aspects of the school's work and the positive effect it has on their child. One said, 'The staff are doing a really good job in helping my son to change his attitude.' Parents indicated that they are particularly pleased with the information they receive about their children's progress. They are very happy with the ways in which the school provides a safe and secure environment in which pupils are successfully challenged to manage their own behaviour.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Polygon School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspector received nine completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 46 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	4	44	4	44	0	0	1	11
The school keeps my child safe	4	44	4	44	1	11	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	4	44	5	56	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	3	33	5	56	0	0	1	11
The teaching is good at this school	6	67	2	22	1	11	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	4	44	4	44	1	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	2	22	6	67	1	11	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	3	33	5	56	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	6	67	2	22	1	11	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	4	44	4	44	1	11	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	4	44	5	56	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	4	44	4	44	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	4	44	4	44	1	11	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



28 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Polygon School, Southampton, SO15 2FH

Thank you for all the help you gave me when I visited your school. I was impressed with your behaviour and the very mature way in which you talked about your experience at school and at home. I enjoyed sitting in on your lessons and listening to your interesting views and some of the developments you would like to see.

You all told me that the school makes a great difference to your behaviour and attitude to education and learning and that this sets you up for a more positive future. I fully agree that the school gives you very good support in helping you to develop your personal and social skills and in managing your own behaviour. The staff set high expectations for you to live up to and lay down clear guidelines for you to follow. Most of you clearly enjoy coming each day, because your attendance has improved significantly and you told me that lessons are much better than in your previous schools. You also pointed out that the staff work very hard to keep you safe and healthy, and you were quick to point out the difference the school has made to your lives. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving much more quickly now that your headteacher has returned to school.

To ensure that things continue to improve at the rate they have done this term, I want the school to:

- make the teaching even better through using your targets more consistently in each lesson. I have asked teachers to show in their planning how the learning of each one of you in the class will be developed.
- develop better systems to track the progress you are making and to enable links to be made between things like your attendance, behaviour and progress to check that you are doing as well as you can.
- consult with the local authority to reappoint an on-site education welfare officer to help you further improve your attendance.

You can help in this by attending regularly and making sure you do your best in every lesson.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Charlton

Lead inspector

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