

# Portland Academy

Weymouth Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, SR3 2NQ

**Inspection dates** 21–22 January 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Leadership and management require improvement. Leaders do not review the school's work rigorously and good self-evaluation practices are not embedded.
- Governors do not interrogate data thoroughly or hold leaders fully to account for students' learning and progress.
- Information about the achievement of children in local authority care is not recorded and reported thoroughly.
- Not enough is being done to develop good attendance.
- The quality of teaching is too variable. As a result, students do not make the progress they could.
- Not all middle leaders are driving improvements in performance well enough to eradicate weaknesses in assessment and planning.
- Sixth form teaching is inconsistent in its impact on achievement. Information about students' prior attainment is not used well enough to ensure that students are challenged and achieve the best they can. Leaders have not done enough to tackle these issues.

### The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher knows what is needed to move the academy forward and her plans focus on the right things.
- Students' behaviour in school and lessons is good. They enjoy school and are keen to learn.
- Students make good progress in some classes because teachers plan activities that enable them to build on what they already know and can do.
- Opportunities to work, perform and serve the community make a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 11 classes. Four observations were carried out jointly with the executive headteacher and senior leaders. Inspectors also observed arrival and departure times, break and lunchtimes, and spent time in corridors and other common areas of the academy.
- Inspectors met with a number of staff including the executive headteacher, head of school and other senior and middle leaders. Meetings were also held with the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Ascent Academies Trust. Telephone discussions were undertaken with two representatives of the local authority.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documents including: information about students' attainment and progress; a number of policies and procedures, including those related to protecting students and keeping them safe; the academy's self-evaluation document and plan for improvement; attendance and exclusion figures; records of incidents and minutes of the governing body.
- Inspectors also looked at a sample of assessment records, reports, books and other work for nine students and reviewed the educational support and progress plans for all children who are in the care of local authorities.
- Inspectors met formally with two groups of students. They also spoke informally with students in lessons and at break and lunchtimes.
- There were 28 responses on Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents and carers). Inspectors took these into account and also met with one parent.
- The inspectors took account of 68 responses to the inspection questionnaire for staff.

## Inspection team

Gina White, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Philip Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The academy provides education for students with a wide range of needs. The largest group are those with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. Some pupils have complex medical conditions. Approximately one third of students have autistic spectrum conditions and a few have moderate learning difficulties. All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- There are typically far more boys than girls on roll.
- Almost all students are White British with a few students who are from Asian and mixed ethnic backgrounds.
- Over half of the students are disadvantaged, a much greater proportion than seen nationally. The academy receives additional funding, known as the pupil premium, to support the education of these students who are known to be eligible for free school meals or in the care of the local authority.
- A small number of students undertake studies at East Durham College and at the following alternative provider, the No Limits Theatre Company.
- No students are entered for GCSE qualifications.
- The academy opened in August 2012. It is part of the Ascent Academies Trust, a partnership of five special schools, four of which are in Sunderland and one in Billingham.
- The headteacher provided leadership support to Ash Trees Academy in Billingham throughout the autumn term 2014. The deputy headteacher managed Portland Academy in her absence.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and its impact on students' learning and progress, including in the sixth form by:
  - making sure that students' progress is assessed regularly and consistently across all subject areas
  - ensuring all teachers plan work to help students build effectively upon what they already know, especially in the sixth form, so that they progressively develop literacy and mathematical skills and make rapid progress from their starting points
  - sharing the features of good teaching and learning found in some classes more widely and giving staff the opportunity to see outstanding practice in mathematics.
- Improve attendance and safety by:
  - ensuring that the progress and attainment of children who are in the care of the local authority is robustly recorded and reported and their views help to inform discussions about their next steps
  - analysing the causes of absence more thoroughly and putting effective strategies in place to ensure that all students are helped to develop good attendance.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - all the actions that are being taken to improve the school's work are thoroughly monitored by leaders and governors to assess their impact and that the evaluation is used to plan the next steps
  - middle leaders monitor their areas of responsibility effectively to gain a clear overview of where strengths and weaknesses lie, and take action accordingly
  - leaders develop and implement policies to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills throughout the curriculum
  - governors interrogate data thoroughly and hold leaders to account for the progress of groups of students including the most able, children in care and disadvantaged students.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher has great ambition for students and expects the highest standards of staff. She is driving change against a background of staff absence that has dogged the academy in the last 18 months. Many staff are responding to the greater accountability and others have left, making way for new senior and middle leaders, some of whom have taken up new roles within the last few months.
- The headteacher, governors and senior leaders have a good grasp of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They have worked hard to update policies and improve systems across the school. Systems that contribute to self-evaluation and review are not as effective as leaders, governors and the academy trust believe them to be.
- The quality of teaching and the performance of teachers are kept under regular review and leadership of teaching is developing but is not yet good. The headteacher is aware of inconsistencies and knows where the best teaching is. Training and support have had a good impact on teachers' work with students with autism conditions.
- Actions to improve teaching further, through the sharing of good practice in assessment and using data, are at an early stage. Regular checks do not always focus sharply on the impact teaching has on students' learning to ensure that teaching is consistently of the highest quality. This lessens the impact of the management and appraisal of teachers' performance.
- School plans are clearly focused on the right things needed to bring about improvements. Staff are working hard to implement them. Targets to raise achievement and improve the quality of teaching are clearer in the latest plans.
- The actions taken, however, have not ensured that improvements are sustained. Recent changes to the roles of some senior leaders mean they are still getting to grips with their new responsibilities, for example, oversight of the achievement of students in care, and leadership of attendance.
- Middle leaders do not have a clear enough picture of achievement in their subjects. Improvement plans such as those for mathematics and English in the sixth form are still concerned with establishing systems and are weaker in identifying what needs to be done to accelerate students' progress.
- Checks and reporting across a range of the academy's work are not always analysed thoroughly to identify the impact that actions are having, or to identify where further attention is needed. For example, to identify why attendance has stalled for some students, and whether additional support for mathematics is enabling students to catch-up and sustain their progress.
- The curriculum includes an appropriately broad range of subjects. Support for students' care and welfare needs are well balanced with programmes of learning. Extensive extra-curricular activities and projects requiring students to work together to tackle challenges are much enjoyed. The impact on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. However, the contribution to developing students' numeracy and literacy skills is mixed because the curriculum is not always planned and assessed well.
- Opportunities to work, perform and serve the community make a good contribution to preparing students for their next steps. Students know the difference between right and wrong and have tolerance and respect for differences. They are developing a sound understanding of society and the importance of the police and others who help us.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors are informed about the school's work. They receive regular reports and instigate their own visits to check aspects of the academy's work. For example, governors' visits following changes to procedures assured them that behaviour is dealt with effectively and students are safe.
  - Governors know that additional funding has been spent to improve the progress of disadvantaged students and that this has benefited them. Leaders and governors do not ask for an evaluation of the performance of a wide enough range of groups. Governors have not kept a close eye on the achievement of vulnerable students who are in the care of the local authority.
  - Governors are well informed about performance management processes and receive regular reports about the quality of teaching, salaries and the improving staff attendance resulting from changes to procedures.
  - The governing body has ensured the school is well resourced through its financial management. Facilities and improvements in resources support students with the most intensive care and support needs very well.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils** requires improvement**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is good. Students typically are engaged in lessons, and many show they are enjoying learning. Students cooperate positively with staff and visitors: they are polite, welcoming and courteous.
- Good systems for managing students' behaviour are well understood by students and staff. Students whose communication and anxiety difficulties make it much more of a challenge for them to manage their own behaviour respond well to the clear routines in lessons and around the academy.
- The academy has identified hotspots when incidents may occur at key points during the day as students move around the buildings. They take steps to tackle this and do so very effectively. Break and lunchtimes are calm, and incidents are dealt with quickly and in a measured way. Incidents of poor behaviour are declining in response to the consistent and sensitive application of the school's behaviour policy.
- Staff skillfully help those students who require additional support to overcome behaviours that hamper their learning. Appropriate strategies are diagnosed and well-trained staff work effectively, and sensitively, with students and their families to help them. Students' progress towards achieving their targets is checked regularly and small steps in progress are carefully charted and celebrated.
- Activities and clubs are well attended during the day and make a good contribution to students' positive attitudes and social development. Many opportunities help students to develop a sense of responsibility and to distinguish right and wrong and contribute to decision making. For example, students participate in drama productions and contribute to the work of the academy through the school council. The choices and decisions they make are well supported, for example, in selecting play equipment and charity events. Students say that these are the best things about the academy.

**Safety**

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure requires improvement. The academy has not fully complied with the statutory recording and reporting requirements for children in the care of the local authority. Information about the progress students are making, their achievements and students' own views are missing, or not well enough explained to contribute meaningfully to discussions about their next steps. There are signs that greater attention is beginning to be given to these points in the latest reviews for a few of these students and to improving communication with local authorities.
- Appropriate safety checks are made on all new employees and arrangements to safeguard students meet requirements.
- Students who spoke to inspectors said they feel safe in school. They trust staff, let them know if there are problems and are confident they will help them. This was also reflected in parents' and carers' responses to the inspection questionnaire.
- Very occasionally, incidents of bullying take place and are investigated. Students say staff are quick to sort out any 'name calling'. A small number of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire felt the academy could do more to tackle bullying.
- Attendance is below the national average and although it is not declining, neither is it improving rapidly. Most students are attending regularly, including some with medical needs. The attendance of students is carefully recorded, including those students attending alternative provision, but is not analysed in depth. Oversight of the work to promote good attendance has recently changed and the new leadership has yet to determine what needs to be done to drive further improvement.

**The quality of teaching** requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement as it is not good enough over time to ensure that all students achieve well and are consistently supported to deepen their knowledge and understanding.
- In some classes and in students' books, the level of challenge in activities and tasks is often too easy but rarely too great. The next steps suggested often repeat, rather than provide opportunities to see what else students can do and how far they can go.
- Teachers' knowledge of how to plan for small steps progress in mathematics is less secure than in English.
- Some teachers demonstrate high expectations, and in these classes students rise to the challenge of producing good quality work. For example, three Year 10 and Year 11 students quickly grasped the rhyming in a poem and developed their own through testing and trialling words, carefully forming letters, rubbing out where letters fell short of their standards, until the task was completed.

- The most effective planning ensures tasks and activities are well matched to students' learning needs and targets. For example, leaves, feathers and other objects helped students with the most profound and complex needs to describe textures and recall short sequences of events in a story.
- Teachers and teaching assistants give students time and encourage them to respond to questions, but this is not a consistent feature of teaching.
- Where learning is most effective students work with enthusiasm, sustain concentration and complete tasks with little support.
- Praise is not given randomly, but used to reward effort and recognise when key markers are reached, such as achieving a target.
- Sharply focused comments by some teaching assistants and teachers identify key steps and record clearly when milestones in achievement have been reached. This good practice is not systematic across all staff and records are not always shared well enough when students move to new classes.
- The accuracy of the assessments of students work, and the use of this information to inform teaching, requires improvement. Assessments when students' join the school and subsequently, lack the breadth and rigour to identify what students know and can do in reading, writing and mathematics and across a range of subjects.
- Teaching plans developed from these assessments are not always as finely focused as they need to be to ensure that students build on the skills they have already learnt, particularly when they move to new classes in each key stage and when they enter the sixth form.

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- The academy's latest data show that significant numbers of students are making slower progress in mathematics compared to English. Focused, individual support for these students, including a high proportion of the school's most able students, is underway.
- Students are acquiring strategies to support and develop their reading and communication skills at a steady rate.
- There are no significant variations in achievement between any of the various groups within the school. Disadvantaged students make slightly better progress than their peers in English and mathematics. This is because pupil premium funding is used to provide individual support in these subjects and also additional therapy support to make sure their progress is developed.
- The achievement of students who attend alternative provision is not analysed or recorded separately by the academy. Students generally attend well and are learning useful rules and procedures to keep themselves safe. As a result, Year 11 and sixth form students achieve qualifications in arts, the care of animals and personal development.
- Most Key Stage 4 students made good progress in 2014 and met their targets in English and mathematics, but just under one third did not. The reasons for this are not known.
- All students who left the sixth form in 2014 continued in education, training or employment.
- Older students are well equipped for their future lives through a wide range of work and community experiences. Their independence, social and work-related skills are well developed through enterprise tasks, and drama performances.

### The sixth form provision

### requires improvement

- The leadership and management of the sixth form require improvement. Information from monitoring checks, data analysis and students' books is not brought together and used effectively to decide how effective actions have been or what needs to happen next. The academy's evidence for its evaluation that sixth form provision is at least good has not been provided, particularly in relation to the progress being made in English and mathematics.
- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. Almost all students at Portland continue their education, with many studying for qualifications that they began in Year 11. Gaps in the information provided about students' prior achievement mean their targets in Year 12 are not always as challenging as they need to be. Consequently, students' progress could be more rapid.
- Teaching requires improvement. Some teaching secures good progress but this is not consistent. A scrutiny of students' books showed wide variation in the quality of teaching and the expectations that teachers have, particularly for the most able writers and mathematicians.
- The curriculum is broad and relevant. Most students are following programmes which meet their needs. A

variety of courses and units are available. Students' individual programmes allow them to work towards higher levels of qualification.

- Appropriate independent information, advice and guidance are provided. The views of parents, carers and students are not used to shape individual programmes as usefully as they could be.
- Opportunities for students to work in the community and within placements in the academy cafe ensure they are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. They are keen to learn, are resilient and practise handwriting without support.
- Students enjoy the responsibilities of being in the sixth form. They are keen to discuss their work to help younger students to ride bicycles and the enjoyment they get from working in the on-site café. They are developing maturity and independence where it is possible for them to do so and have some knowledge of risks to their health.

## What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	138526
<b>Local authority</b>	Sunderland
<b>Inspection number</b>	449511

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	156
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	49
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	June Torgersen
<b>Headteacher</b>	Melanie Carson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01915536050
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