

CfBT Inspection Services  
Suite 22  
West Lancs Investment  
Centre  
Maple View  
Skelmersdale  
WN8 9TG

T 0300 123 1231

Text Phone: 0161 6188524

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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

Direct T 01695 566 855

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: [gnewton@cfbt.com](mailto:gnewton@cfbt.com)



25 April 2015

Mrs Melanie Carson  
Headteacher  
Portland Academy  
Weymouth Road  
Sunderland  
Tyne and Wear  
SR3 2NQ

Dear Mrs Carson

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Portland Academy, Sunderland**

Following my visit to your school on 24 April 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should, however, take further action to:

- Include a clearer audit start point for each of the separate priorities in the post-Ofsted action plan as an aid to senior leaders and governors more accurately assessing the rate of progress over the life of the plan.
- Ensure coherence and alignment of the separate post-Ofsted action plan with the academy development plan.
- Develop and implement a strategy for regularly keeping parents and carers updated on the progress of the academy.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, and three representatives of the Governing Body to discuss the actions taken since

the previous inspection. On the day before the inspection visit, I also had a telephone conversation with one of the external consultants currently working with the academy. During my visit, I read and evaluated the academy action plan, notes of visit from the external consultant, in addition to examining the most recent attendance data.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team (SLT) have been reviewed and refined. A Portland Academy Monitoring Group (PAMG) has been formed, specifically to overview the progress of the academy against the priorities and actions from the post-Ofsted action plan. This group comprises two local governors (from the academy) and two Ascent Trust governors. One member of the senior leadership team is currently on extended absence from school, with the different responsibilities of this management role being assigned to other SLT members on a temporary basis.

## **Main findings**

The governors and senior leaders have responded promptly to the recommendations from the recent inspection. A very detailed post-Ofsted action plan, separate from the academy development plan, has been written, which addresses each of the separate areas for improvement from the inspection report. After several iterations, the current action plan is now fit for purpose, and is being used effectively by the newly formed PAMG of governors to oversee the progress being made by the academy. Further iterations are, however, needed to help make the plan even more effective as a tool for senior leaders and governors to accurately assess the on-going progress of the academy over the life of the plan. This includes a clearer audit start point for each of the separate action points, and a strategy for regularly sharing the on-going progress of the academy with all parents and/or carers. Although the academy senior leaders are able to show an improving trend in many of the improvement areas identified in the previous inspection report, they are aware of the need to maintain the impetus for change. The overall quality of teaching is improving because of the challenge from senior leaders to all teaching staff to continuously improve. Although attendance has not improved, senior leaders now have a clearer understanding of the factors which affect regular attendance for different groups of students. The redefined roles and responsibilities for senior leaders, along with clearer roles for middle leaders is at a very early stage, but the early signs are of an academy, which is challenging itself to be much more accountable and responsible for improving all aspects of its provision. Those staff who spoke with HMI were positive about the changes that have occurred since the inspection; not least, their greater involvement in school-related improvement matters.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

## **External support**

The academy has received on-going support through its academy chain (Ascent Trust), which has been proportional to its needs. The academy has also enlisted the support of three external consultants to work with nominated staff. One of these consultants has been providing timely and helpful support in relation to the development of the post-Ofsted action plan, alongside the developing roles of the SLT. The academy has also made some productive links with an officer from the local authority relating to the collection and presentation of assessment data.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Sunderland.

Yours sincerely

Brian Blake

**Her Majesty's Inspector**