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Sharon Common  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Common

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

Following my visit to your academy on 17 December 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in June 2017, the academy was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and members of the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the academy to become good.

The academy should take further action to:

- ensure that teachers use the information available to them to tailor planning to meet the needs of the pupils in their class even more effectively.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher and the headteacher, in addition to other senior and middle leaders. I also met with members of the trust and the chief executive officer to discuss the actions that have been taken since the last inspection. Specific meetings were held to discuss how pupils' behaviour is managed and recorded, improvements to the quality of information advice and guidance given to pupils, and how the quality of teaching is monitored. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including: the school's view of its own performance; monitoring records; information about pupils' progress; and the school improvement plan. I observed learning in lessons across the school, including the sixth form.

## **Context**

At the time of the previous inspection, changes that had been made to the structure of the trust and membership of the leadership team were relatively recent. The executive headteacher, headteacher, and members of the senior leadership team are now experienced in their roles. The system of accountability from members of the trust through to classroom teachers is now fully embedded.

## **Main findings**

You and other senior leaders have a good handle on the quality of education on offer at school. Systems and processes that you use to check the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils are making are strong. As a result, you know exactly where strengths lie and where there are areas for further improvement. You use this information effectively in school development planning. There is a coherent set of checks and balances within the trust and throughout your school. Trustees are given up-to-date and relevant information about the performance of your school. They are able to support and challenge you as a result.

At the time of the previous inspection, the curriculum that you had established was in its infancy. Now, your four pathways are embedded. Parents and members of staff understand the system, and pupils' needs are being increasingly well met. Pupils who have the most complex needs receive teaching and therapies that support their physical and cognitive development. Teachers support pupils who have autistic spectrum condition well and understand their additional behavioural needs. The most able pupils in your school are making gains in their learning and are accessing an increasingly wide range of accreditations at key stages 4 and 5. You have developed assessment processes linked to the needs of pupils on different pathways. You have put 'I can' statements in place for different subjects accordingly. You spoke with me about your plans to further develop these in line with your own policy.

You have been working with teachers and teaching assistants to ensure that planning is more closely aligned to the needs of pupils in classes. Your pathway system and assessment processes are helping members of staff to identify the skills, abilities and needs of pupils. Teachers use the information that they have about pupils in their care increasingly well. However, you recognise that the use of this information could be even more effective.

Teaching at your school is characterised by strong routines, respect between pupils and members of staff, and a consistent approach to planning. For example, teachers use 'orange files' to organise and capture any pastoral needs that pupils have so that teaching aligns more closely to pupils' individual requirements. The use of these files is consistent across school. You have also ensured that, since the last inspection, no time is lost at the beginning or the end of the day due to traffic or transport issues. Learning time is therefore maximised. Materials and resources that teachers choose for their classes are now more age-appropriate.

The development of enterprise skills has a high priority at school. Careers education plays a strong role in the formal curriculum, and this is having a positive impact on pupils' confidence and in the way in which they are prepared for adulthood. Students in the sixth form have careers lessons and opportunities to develop their enterprise skills. The way in which pupils are prepared for adulthood also has a high priority when staff and parents review education, health and care plans. Already, the impact of these developments can be seen. For example, there is a wider menu of opportunities for work experience placements. Consequently, there is also a higher rate of uptake of these experiences on the part of the pupils.

You and other school leaders have a renewed focus on ensuring that pupils, and students in the sixth form, leave school ready for the next stages of their life. Students who left the sixth form in 2018 moved on to a wider range of courses than those that left the school in 2017, for example. School leaders ensure that information, advice and guidance given to pupils in key stage 4 is more tailored to their need. As a result, pupils do not assume that the sixth form at Portland Academy is their only option. In 2018, several changed school and began 16 to 19 study programmes at a local college.

Teachers and teaching assistants are now more proactive in the way in which they manage the behaviour of pupils. 'Behaviour plans' are in place for individual pupils that highlight ways in which to keep them calm and focused, and how to deescalate any issues that occur. As a result, there is less and less need to keep pupils safe using physical intervention. Behaviour records are comprehensive, and members of staff use these to learn how to further improve pupils' focus at school. You and other leaders are keen to learn from any incidents. Consequently, safeguarding processes are dynamic and continue to be effective.

You continue to focus on ensuring that your school is a welcoming and supportive environment for pupils. The range of therapies on offer and the individual care and

attention afforded to your pupils is impressive. During the inspection, I saw parents and carers being delighted by their children's participation in the talent show. I, too, congratulate your pupils' efforts and I enjoyed seeing them perform. Many pupils at school are clearly developing in confidence.

Members of the trust have taken the areas for improvement as outlined in the previous inspection report very seriously. I found clear evidence of you, and other school leaders, taking effective action in these areas. You are clear that there is still work to do but are committed to making the school as best as it can be for the benefit of the pupils in your care.

### **External support**

In addition to the support provided by colleagues from other schools within the multi-academy trust, school leaders are active in establishing partnerships and seeking external validation. Recently, school leaders commissioned a quality assurance review from private consultants and serving headteachers. The school has been reaccredited by the National Autistic Society as offering quality provision for pupils. The school is part of the national special schools' network. In addition, school leaders have set up a hub in the north-east of England to share good practice and to support teachers' professional development.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Wardle

**Her Majesty's Inspector**