



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR PORTLAND ACADEMY

Name of School:	Portland Academy
Head of academy:	Sharon Common
Hub:	North East Special Hub
School type:	Special
MAT:	Ascent

Estimate at this QA Review:	Good
Date of this Review:	12/12/2018. This is the school's first review.
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Requires Improvement
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	21/06/2017



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR PORTLAND ACADEMY

Quality Assurance Review

The review team, comprising of host school leaders and visiting reviewers agree that evidence indicates these areas are evaluated as follows:

School Improvement Strategies	GOOD
Outcomes for Pupils	GOOD
Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment	GOOD
Overall Estimate	GOOD

Please note that a Challenge Partners Quality Assurance Review is not equivalent to an Ofsted inspection, and agreed estimates from the review are not equivalent to Ofsted judgements.

1. Context and character of the school

- Portland Academy accommodates students from 11 to 19 years of age. There are 169 students on roll, 54 of which attend the post-16 provision. It is an average-sized special school.
- Students have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD) and some who have autistic spectrum conditions (ASC).
- About half of the students are disadvantaged, which is higher than the national average. An increasing proportion of students speak English as an additional language.
- The school is a member of the Ascent Academies Trust. The head of the academy was appointed in July 2016. The executive headteacher started working with the school in September 2018.
- The school has gained a number of accreditations. These include Autism Accreditation, Investors in People (bronze) and Artsmark.
- The school does not use alternative providers.
- The mission statement of Portland is: to value, to respect, to promote optimal learning.
- The curriculum focuses on developing the key skills of communication, cognition, independence, physical development and self-care. These transferrable skills equip students for life beyond school.
- Students follow a thematic curriculum. Students are streamed in their English and mathematics learning.
- The senior leadership team is relatively newly formed. It is now in its third year of collaborative working.

2.1 School Improvement Strategies - What went well

- Leaders have a reliable awareness of the professional development that each member of staff has received. They use this to inform what they expect to see when they observe teaching. As a result, they know how teaching continues to improve across the school, notably in the post-16 provision.
- Leaders are dedicated to improving teaching and learning. Senior leaders have ensured that the roles of teachers, middle leaders and themselves have clear accountability built in. For example, the purpose of a senior leadership role is to moderate the evaluations of colleagues. The teaching in each curriculum pathway has been developed and refined.
- Since the senior leadership team began its work, teachers have been better supported in securing realistic, aspirational targets for students. The assessment system is scheduled with specific weeks used to capture and record students' progress. The trust's framework, based on progression guidance, is used to inform challenging conversations with staff. For example, in pathway 2, looking at

how well students develop their speech and language, making use of a published assessment model.

- As a result of leaders' rigorous monitoring of how the quality of teaching is impacting on achievement, students are securing skills earlier in their Portland career. A clear rationale for the pathway, together with systematic review of targets, is leading to older students attaining relevant, and often higher academic level, qualifications. Each pathway includes a focus on employability or independent outcomes. This recognises the needs of higher ability students.
- For the past two years, sixth form students have been well prepared for their work experience off site. Smarter documentation, including student learning plans which include specific and achievable targets, builds on students' previous achievements. The provision has been transformed. Students are prepared well for adulthood.
- Leaders have worked with staff to create a post-16 environment and provision which recognises the maturity of this group of students. Students eat and socialise in a communal area. Displays recognise and celebrate what students do in terms of putting into practice their employability skills. There is now a clear transition from Year 11 into Year 12.
- Each senior and middle leader reflects on their monitoring and evaluation work and uses this to inform their contribution to the whole school's self-evaluation work. Middle leaders (pathway 1, 2 and 3 and sixth form leaders) are very effective. They are able to convey their impact on improvements in curriculum, teaching and outcomes. Middle leadership is both defined and refined. These leaders have trust-wide roles, for example leading work on early reading acquisition.

2.2 School Improvement Strategies - Even better if...

...the wording in EHCPs was transferred into smart targets in students' learning plans.

...leaders continued to support teachers in lifting expectations of their teaching assistants (TAs) and further held them to account.

...leaders explored how technology might be used to support students in their writing development.

3.1 Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment - What went well

- This year, staff questioning of students has been an improvement focus of teaching. During the review, examples were seen of staff allowing students sufficient time to process information and, similarly, time for students to respond. Also, questions were asked which were tailored to the individual student.

- In the best lessons, TAs supported students' learning well. For example, in a pathway 2 cooking session, a TA recognised when to intervene with a student and successfully used appropriate strategies to encourage more engagement.
- Teachers select resources well to support students' learning. Age appropriate resources in the post-16 provision, for example, included students working with real money. This shows that staff respect students and enable learning to be more concrete. This helps students consolidate core skills. Further, students are able to articulate what they are learning and why.
- A healthy and respectful rapport is evident between staff and students. This contributes well to the calm and purposeful atmosphere at Portland. Effective therapy provision means that students are ready to learn. Any disengagement is managed effectively, which means that other students are not adversely affected.
- Clear learning intentions are evident in teaching. This is seen through effective task design (for example, a post-16 'production line' where each student understood the role they were playing in producing Christmas gifts for others) and appropriate choice of resources (including instructional recipe booklets). Aspirational achievement is promoted. For example, students following pathway 3 were required to demonstrate their knowledge of historical writing (including Egyptian hieroglyphics) and then reflect on why this sort of communication was used at these times.
- A range of strategies is designed and employed to help students become better readers. Staff understand the importance of enabling students to secure a broad and relevant vocabulary, as this will support them well in future learning. This is one rationale for curriculum development.
- Students in the post-16 provision are taught effectively. Teaching recognises students' maturity and the importance of preparation for life after Portland. Students are trusted and expected to learn and play together, both independently and collaboratively. Bespoke timetables are developed and implemented which enable each student to pursue specific employment and qualification routes.

3.2 Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment - Even better if...

- ... TAs used the most appropriate strategies to enable students to learn effectively.
- ... all teachers used pace and time efficiently in lessons to maximise learning.
- ... when talking about learning and achievement, students were included in age appropriate conversations.
- ... teachers became more confident in taking more risks through their creative teaching.

4. Outcomes for Pupils

- Over the last academic year, more than 90% of students made expected progress or better in their reading, writing, speaking and listening and numeracy. 92% of

students met or exceeded their occupational therapy and physiotherapy targets. All school leavers moved on to education, training and employment.

- Leaders and staff consider carefully how both academic and other targets, such as movement and social communication, will inform students' progress through the relevant pathways. For example, some students with PMLD have targets which are designed to measure how well they develop independence, both in terms of their learning and movement around the school site. Such work is helping staff gain a better understanding of student preferences and interests.
- Leaders use formative and summative assessments, aligned to the different curriculum pathways, to inform their evaluation of students' achievement in English and mathematics. Outcomes are measured using the trust's target setting rationale. Leaders evaluate recent historic and current progress rates as good and improving.
- Leaders and staff understand the importance of students gaining a secure vocabulary, which will support their future learning. Staff have introduced a systematic phonic strategy in all literacy lessons and are measuring the impact of this. Specific case studies are referred to. These include how well individual students are acquiring high frequency words.
- Leaders ensure that funding, such as pupil premium, is used to support students' transition into the school. Pathway leaders explain well how the funding has helped evolve each curriculum, employing staff with required skill sets which help teachers tailor provision for each student, including those who are disadvantaged. An impact of this has been staff and students managing anxieties more effectively.
- Leaders from Portland are facilitating trust working groups whose role is to further develop pathway provision. An example of impact is improved reading ages for all students at Portland.
- Students learning in Key Stages 4 and 5 follow accreditation pathways which are meaningful, aspirational and prepare them well for their lives when they leave Portland. Leaders' evaluation of students' outcomes in Key Stage 5 focuses on independence, work related learning, numeracy, literacy, good health and next steps.

5. What additional support would the school like from the Challenge Partners network, either locally or nationally?

Leaders have already made use of their Challenge Partners membership by arranging to visit other special schools. This will enable them to consider ways of improving their provision further.

This review will support the school's continuing improvement. The main findings will be shared within the school's hub in order that it can inform future activities.