

# Poltair School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	112052
<b>Local Authority</b>	Cornwall
<b>Inspection number</b>	378412
<b>Inspection dates</b>	13–14 September 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Robert Pyner HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	778
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Diana Pride
<b>Headteacher</b>	Stephen Tong
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3–4 June 2009
<b>School address</b>	Trevarthian Road St Austell PL25 4BZ
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<b>Age group</b>	11–16
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	13–14 September 2011
<b>Inspection number</b>	378412

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 37 lessons and observed 26 teachers. They held meetings with senior and middle leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, the Chair of the Curriculum Committee, staff and groups of students. A telephone conversation was held with the National Challenge Adviser. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at progress tracking and performance data, the school development plan, minutes of governing body meetings, students' work and numerous policies, guidelines, plans and reviews. The questionnaire responses from 376 parents and carers, 129 students and 81 staff were also analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well different groups, particularly lower ability students, achieve and make progress in their learning across the curriculum, especially in mathematics.
- The extent to which teaching and learning offer support and challenge for all groups of students in order to raise attainment and accelerate progress.
- The appropriateness of the curriculum, including specialist subjects, to provide courses which maximise achievement for all ability groups.
- The accuracy and demonstrable impact of self-evaluation by leaders and managers at all levels in driving up outcomes for all groups of learners and the extent to which this demonstrates capacity for sustained improvement.

## Information about the school

Poltair is smaller than the average comprehensive school and serves St Austell and the surrounding area. The school has specialist status in sports. Most students are from a White British heritage and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The percentage with special educational needs and/or disabilities has increased over the last three years and is well above average; students' needs include moderate and specific learning and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs is also significantly above the national figure. More students join or leave the school part-way through their secondary education than is found nationally.

The school has achieved the Sportsmark, Investors in Careers and Investors in Work Related Learning and Enterprise Education awards.

Childcare provision based on the site is not managed by the school, and is subject to a separate inspection.

**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

Poltair School provides a satisfactory and improving quality of education. Standards of care, guidance and support are strong, effectively promoting students' personal development. The school is particularly successful in supporting the relatively high number of students who transfer to the school other than at the usual times with sensitive induction procedures and continuing support. Since the last inspection, the curriculum has been developed through a range of partnership arrangements so that it meets the aspirations and interests of a broader range of students. As a result, attendance is good and rates of persistent absence are low, as is the proportion of students who are not in employment, education or training when they leave Poltair. Learning is reinforced by the good range of extra-curricular opportunities and sporting activities. Students behave well in and around the school and say they feel safe. In the questionnaire distributed as part of the inspection, parents and carers highlighted the effective work undertaken by the school to ensure their children are safe and cared for.

Overall, although attainment is low, it is improving strongly. Since the last inspection, the drive of the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, and governors has continued to have a positive impact on raising attainment and accelerating progress. All groups of students make satisfactory progress and this is improving securely and quickly. Examples of this are the significant improvements in attainment in English and science. In mathematics, improvements are less marked but the newly appointed subject leader has implemented a clear development plan. Understandably, in recent years the specific support to raise students' achievement has focused on the older students although strategies, for example the accelerated reader programme, are now being developed in Key Stage 3.

Teaching is satisfactory and improving. Strengths include the level of teachers' subject knowledge, positive relationships and the effective way that students are encouraged to reflect on their learning by discussing their work in pairs or small groups. Overall, the newly introduced 100 minute lessons are beginning to be used effectively to develop the variety of tasks and provide time for students to reflect on their learning through, for example, 'pit-stop plenaries'. However, there are fewer opportunities for them to apply their knowledge, understanding and skills in specific learning activities. Additionally, although teachers use a range of assessment data, these are not used sharply enough to plan activities to challenge specific ability groups.

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The school uses its specialist status effectively to extend the curriculum, enhance students' opportunities and build very effective links with the community through, for example, Family Nights. Physical education staff have also worked successfully to develop training activities across departments as part of the school's improvement plan.

Senior leaders evaluate the work of the school accurately. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement based on the careful analysis of students' progress in curriculum subjects and the monitoring of teaching and learning. Leaders have spent some time refining systems to track and monitor progress although currently these are not used consistently across the school. Governors are fully committed to improving achievement. They are satisfactorily involved in holding the school to account although the information they receive from the school has not led to challenge resulting in consistent improvement across all subjects. Overall, the improvements in attainment, teaching and learning and the shared commitment of staff and governors demonstrate a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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

- Raise attainment and accelerate rates of progress so that by summer 2012 Year 11 students achieve at least the current challenging predicted outcomes.
- Ensure that all teaching is focused on maximising the progress students make by:
  - developing greater consistency in the use of progress-tracking data to plan activities which match their needs more closely and challenge different ability groups
  - planning lessons that include learning activities which require students to apply their knowledge, understanding and skills more effectively
  - developing the current focus on improving the literacy skills for Key Stage 3 students
  - ensuring greater consistency in the monitoring of students' progress by senior and middle leaders.
- Report on the analysis of the progress made by students including key groups at each full meeting of the governing body so that senior and middle leaders can be held to account in a regular and systematic way.

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## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grade C or above, including English and mathematics, was significantly below average in 2010 and the latest unvalidated results show only a modest improvement. However, over time this represents a strongly improving profile. This improvement is particularly impressive in English and science. For example, English results show an improvement of 13% in the proportion of students gaining an A\* to C grade since 2008. Other subjects that perform consistently well include art and design and geography. Improvement in mathematics is slower, although inspection evidence shows clear improvement plans are in place and are beginning to make a difference.

School data and observation of lessons confirm that learning and progress for all groups of students are satisfactory in relation to their starting points and that they are improving securely and quickly. For example, students in Years 10 and 11 have benefited from an effective system of intervention and academic support. As a result, the attainment of boys and girls from all ability groups, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is improving. Particularly effective are the personalised support programmes available for students who transfer to the school part-way through the year. In addition, the school is developing further intervention strategies for younger students, for example the accelerated reader programme for Year 7 and Year 8 students.

Students generally want to do well and demonstrate good attitudes to learning and behaviour, exemplifying the '5Ps' guidance. Discussions with students show that they generally enjoy their lessons and appreciate the good relationships found within the school. They told inspectors that they particularly liked lessons where they can undertake a range of practical activities. Attendance has improved well and is above average. Older students recognise the improvements in the school over the last few years, especially in standards of discipline and behaviour together with clear support to help them achieve their targets. They also note that leaders take their views seriously; for example, students worked on the development of the anti-bullying policy. The school is effective in promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, particularly through its specialism, and wider themes are considered sensitively in religious education and humanities subjects. Students particularly enjoy the 'Charming Chaps' and 'Gorgeous Girls' themed days on health and personal development. Elements of workplace skills are developed well, such as links with local businesses and information and communication technology, but weaker literacy and numeracy skills mean that this aspect is satisfactory overall rather than good.

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Lesson observations show that teachers have effectively prepared for the recent introduction of longer lesson times and have successfully developed appropriate strategies for learning. One of these is the 'pit-stop plenary' where teachers can check whether students have understood the important aspects of the lesson and adjust their teaching if appropriate. Students spoken to appreciated the opportunity to work in pairs or groups afforded by longer lesson times. Lessons generally meet students' needs and planning is being developed to focus on clearer steps for progression in subjects. However, although observations showed effective teaching linked to assessment at a whole-class level, there was less evidence of learning activities being sharply focused on the needs of specific ability groups securely based on their prior attainment. Where this is the case, the lack of focused challenge for groups and individuals leads to lower achievement for some students. Furthermore, students' practical application of learning is not seen consistently across the school and where this is not a feature of the lesson, progress can slow. Most students are aware of their attainment levels and learning targets but some said that homework assignments are sometimes slow to be returned and, where this happens, learning can lose its impact.

The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets the needs and interests of the students well. This reflects the effort by leaders to improve this aspect of its provision, often

<sup>1</sup> 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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working in partnership with other providers, including the nearby further education college, local schools and employers. There is now an appropriate balance of academic subjects and thoughtfully structured personal, social and health education, citizenship and vocational programmes, leading to a range of qualifications. The development of the options programme for Year 8 students and the introduction of GCSE courses in Year 9 has raised aspirations and developed appropriate challenge for some groups. The school provides a broad range of extra-curricular clubs and activities, which enrich the curriculum and are attended by a high proportion of students; there is a reward system for participation. The sports specialism significantly enhances the range of opportunities available across the school and provides effective links with the community through, for example, the well-attended Family Nights.

Most parents and carers noted in the inspection questionnaire that the school has effective procedures for promoting safety and students report that they feel safe at school. They say that incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with quickly by staff. Transition arrangements for when the students join or leave the school are thorough. The school has worked well to integrate the significant number of students across all age groups who join the school through the year. Some of these are vulnerable young people and the school works very effectively to integrate and support these students. Staff work well with a range of external agencies. Overall, the school is a very inclusive and welcoming community. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well with appropriate information and support available and accessible for staff.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

As the professional leader of the school, the headteacher has an open and thoughtful approach with a clear vision for an inclusive community where students can develop their skills and talents fully. Older students speak positively about the improvements he has initiated over the last three years. Senior and middle leaders share this commitment to raising attainment and accelerating progress across the school. The regular and focused use of systems to monitor students’ progress in order to identify and target underachievement has undergone a number of developments and there is now an established system in place. The good-quality progress data available have supported raised expectations through, for example, regular Raising Achievement Plan meetings and have had a positive impact on teaching and learning across the



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school. However, systems are not used consistently across all departments and this leads to variability in outcomes. Now, senior leaders are aware that the time is right to raise expectations further in order to accelerate improvement in achievement even more.

Governors are well led, supportive and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They demonstrate a determined commitment to play a full part in the challenge of raising students’ achievement in all aspects of school life. Currently, although they have detailed information about the school’s performance this could be used more rigorously to hold senior and middle leaders to account in order to improve outcomes further.

The school promotes equality and tackles discrimination satisfactorily. It provides an inclusive environment where students with different abilities and needs are encouraged to take full advantage of the opportunities available. However, individual education plans for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are not always used effectively to plan lessons. Links with parents and carers are good, with the school seeking their views through regular surveys. Staff work hard to share with the community the information about the wide range of activities that take place at the school through, for example, the high quality Spotlight Newsletter available on the website. The school promotes community cohesion well, based on its audit of provision. The impact of this work can be seen in the harmonious way that students from different backgrounds work together.

Staff receive appropriate training in child protection and there are thorough recruitment procedures to check the suitability of staff to work with children. Overall, procedures for safeguarding students are good.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

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## Views of parents and carers

A much higher proportion of parents and carers than average returned questionnaires during the inspection, representing 48% of the students on roll. However, the questionnaire was distributed a few days into the new school year and, perhaps as a result, some parents did not feel they could answer all the questions. Some questions had a significant number of the responses which were blank. Most parents and carers are happy with their children's experience at the school. Responses show that they feel strongly that their children enjoy school, are safe and cared for, teaching is good and that their children are well prepared for the future. Most parents and carers also feel that they are informed about their child's progress and that the leaders and managers of the school are effective. A few believe that the school is less effective in dealing with unacceptable behaviour and that their children could make more progress. During the inspection the inspectors found that the school had effective procedures for managing behaviour and that students made satisfactory progress taking into account their starting points.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Poltair 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 inspection team received 376 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 778 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	84	22	241	64	36	10	6	2
The school keeps my child safe	94	25	254	68	14	4	1	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	88	23	207	55	42	11	6	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	76	20	211	56	52	14	6	2
The teaching is good at this school	71	19	238	63	31	8	1	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	60	16	226	60	46	12	5	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	59	16	233	62	52	14	3	1
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)	77	20	227	60	23	6	2	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	67	18	225	60	39	10	10	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	71	19	198	53	55	15	16	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	51	14	231	61	35	9	10	3
The school is led and managed effectively	84	22	230	61	22	6	4	1
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	89	24	218	58	41	11	5	1

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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## 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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**

15 September 2011

Dear Students



### **Inspection of Poltair School, St Austell, PL25 4BZ**

Thank you for making the inspection team so welcome when we inspected your school recently. Special thanks go to the student guides who helped us find our way around and to those of you who completed the questionnaire; we found this very useful. We enjoyed talking to you and found what you had to say very informative and relevant. This letter is to tell you about our findings.

Poltair School provides a satisfactory and improving standard of education. We were impressed by your good behaviour and the quality of your relationships with adults and other students. Attainment at the end of Year 11 is low but improving strongly; the progress that you make in your learning is satisfactory and improving quickly but could be greater. The opportunities you have through the specialist subject of sports are good. You are cared for and supported well and some of you told inspectors that you appreciate this. Your parents and carers also like the way you are cared for and supported. Teaching is satisfactory overall with some that is good and better. Your teachers provide you with a good curriculum that increasingly meets your interests and needs.

The headteacher, senior staff and governors provide clear leadership. They recognise that there are always areas for improvement, and we have asked them to:

- raise attainment and accelerate rates of progress in all subjects so that by the end of Year 11 you at least meet the targets set for you
- develop teaching strategies which will help you achieve as well as you can and for senior leaders and governors to monitor these regularly so that extra support may be available to individuals and groups who need it.

You too have an important part to play by continuing to work hard, making the most of the wide range of opportunities you have at school and attending regularly.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Robert Pyner  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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