

Poltair School

Trevarthian Road, St Austell, Cornwall PL25 4BZ

Inspection dates

3–4 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Senior and middle leaders have been too slow in improving the quality of teaching since the previous inspection and teaching remains uneven.
- Not all senior and subject leaders are effective in evaluating teaching and learning, and in identifying and meeting teachers' specific development needs.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough.
- Time is not always used productively to promote pupils' good progress throughout lessons.
- Too many teachers are not checking pupils' learning during lessons and reshaping activities to ensure that all pupils are challenged to make good progress. Not all teachers are implementing the school's marking and feedback policy in a way that ensures that pupils' work improves.
- Pupils' progress in year groups and their GCSE results are too variable across subjects, especially for disadvantaged pupils and the most able.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher, other leaders and staff have created a positive learning environment which makes a strong contribution to pupils' confidence and enjoyment of school.
- The staff are committed to supporting the personal development, behaviour and welfare of all pupils and this aspect of the school's work is good.
- Governors increasingly challenge school leaders to improve weaknesses. This is leading, for example, to rapid improvements in attendance.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs achieve well.
- In subjects where teachers make effective use of assessment, as in humanities subjects, pupils' achievement is good.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - making more productive use of time in lessons to quicken the rate of progress
 - developing teachers' skills in checking pupils' understanding and in reshaping lessons to challenge and support all to make good progress
 - ensuring that teachers follow the school's marking and feedback policy in such a way that pupils' work improves.
- Build on the existing good practice in humanities subjects to secure consistently good progress for all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and the most able, across all year groups and subjects.
- Develop the skills of senior and middle leaders in evaluating accurately the impact of teaching on pupils' academic progress, and use the information to inform the training and development of all staff.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Senior leaders have not acted quickly enough to improve the quality of teaching, learning and pupils' progress to raise standards of attainment consistently across subjects.
- They have not set high enough expectations for staff of what pupils can achieve.
- Senior and middle leaders are monitoring teaching and learning appropriately through lesson observations, regular examination of pupils' work and analysis of information on pupils' progress. However, they are not all evaluating robustly the impact of teaching on pupils' progress in order to identify and support teachers' specific development needs.
- School improvement planning identifies appropriate priorities, including raising pupils' aspirations, and leads to improvements in systems, for example for managing staff performance. However, actions are not always followed through sufficiently to ensure that procedures such as marking are carried out effectively by all staff.
- Successful departments such as humanities are beginning to be used to develop teaching, learning and assessment in other subjects, but this is too recent to have addressed the uneven impact of subject leadership across the school.
- There has been a recent reorganisation of the responsibilities of senior leaders and heads of year, and the appointment of new subject leaders. This is leading to improved systems being implemented, including more effective systems for monitoring pupils' progress and attendance, and for behaviour management.
- Funding for Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up programmes, the pupil premium and funding to support special educational needs are used appropriately to improve the achievement of identified pupils. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school and nationally is closing, although it remains wide.
- The headteacher's vision for high-quality personal development and well-being for all pupils is shared by the staff who ensure that all pupils have equal access to learning. Vulnerable pupils are supported well. There is a strong culture of respect and tolerance within the school and diversity is valued.
- The staff are aware of how to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism.
- The curriculum has been improved since the previous inspection and now provides more opportunities for pupils to study history, geography and modern foreign languages at GCSE. The curriculum is broad and balanced. It includes appropriate vocational and academic subjects and is enhanced by a range of well-attended extra-curricular activities, including sport.
- The teaching of personal, social, health and economic education, and ethics and morals, makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils learn about British values, for instance the rule of law and democracy, through subjects such as humanities and activities including school council elections. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain.
- Parents are supportive of the school's work. Several parents praised the support provided for their children who have special educational needs. Many also commented on how quickly their children settled into the school on transition from primary school. Typical comments included, 'Teaching staff have been so supportive and understanding of [my daughter's] needs as a child with dyslexia.'
- The school has drawn appropriately on external support for its improvement work, including a wide range of support provided by the local authority. As a result, appropriate staffing and systems are now in place to quicken the pace of improvement.

The governance of the school:

- is challenging senior leaders appropriately to ensure that teachers' assessment of pupils' progress is accurate so that underperformance can be identified and addressed early enough to prevent any future decline in GCSE outcomes
- has challenged senior leaders effectively to improve pupils' attendance
- has supported senior leaders in addressing staffing issues
- monitors regularly pupils' progress to ensure that funding, such as the Year 7 catch-up funding for literacy and numeracy, the pupil premium and funding for special educational needs, is being used appropriately to raise the attainment of identified pupils
- understands how staff performance is managed and does not agree progression through the pay scales unless there is evidence of progress

- attends training, for example in safeguarding and safer recruitment of staff
- ensures that all statutory requirements are met.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff have been trained appropriately and can explain the procedures for safeguarding pupils. Pupils say they feel safe in school and this is confirmed by the responses to Parent View.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Teaching is too variable within and across subjects to raise pupils' achievement.
- Too many teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly most-able pupils.
- Too often, pupils are given too much time to complete tasks in lessons and the level of challenge is not increased enough. Over time, this slows the rate of progress.
- Not all teachers are skilled in checking how well pupils are learning and in adapting the lesson to address misconceptions and reinforce the learning for those who require it, while at the same time challenging those who are ready to progress further.
- While all teachers follow aspects of the school's marking policy, they are not consistently ensuring that pupils' work improves as a result of the feedback they receive.
- Pupils make good progress in humanities subjects because the teachers use assessment effectively. Teachers check pupils' learning at regular intervals and use the information to plan the lesson for the pupils' different levels of understanding. They set high expectations by demonstrating the quality of work required and extend pupils' thinking and responses by skilful use of questioning, for example asking, 'What difference does that make?' They check pupils' understanding during the lesson and reinforce the learning for those who need it, while challenging others to deepen their learning. Pupils say that they make good progress in humanities because lessons follow a clear sequence and teachers' marking helps them to know precisely what to do to improve their work. This was seen to be the case. Time is used productively to move the learning forward.
- In all lessons, positive relationships between pupils and between pupils and teachers give pupils the confidence to contribute and to learn from their mistakes.
- Mathematics lessons are increasingly interesting pupils because teachers link the work to relevant life situations. This is an improvement since the previous inspection.
- Across subjects, pupils are given opportunities to develop and apply their skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics. This is particularly strong in humanities subjects where pupils write at length and take pride in the presentation of their work.
- The school's recently introduced online homework policy is used consistently to enhance learning in lessons.
- Parents are given appropriate information about their children's achievement in school reports.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive throughout the school. Pupils are punctual to lessons and apply themselves to their work. They work well together, showing respect for each other's ideas and points of view. This makes a strong contribution to their self-confidence.
- Pupils use the good level of impartial careers advice provided by the school to make choices about the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- Through the curriculum, pupils learn about the negative effects of bullying. They say that there is little bullying in the school and that any incidents are dealt with effectively by the staff. School records confirm this. Year 11 prefects help staff to secure a safe environment by supervising pupils around the school at break and lunchtimes.
- Teachers and other adults are quick to tackle the rare use of derogatory or aggressive language and always challenge stereotyping.

- Pupils say that they feel safe in school. Through assemblies, tutor time, personal, social, health and economic education, and physical education, they learn how to keep themselves safe and healthy, including through safe and positive relationships. In computer science they learn how to prevent the misuse of technology.
- The school monitors regularly the behaviour and attendance of the few pupils who are educated in alternative provision and ensures that they are safe.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development helps them to reflect on, and take responsibility for, their actions as good citizens. They discuss moral issues in ethics and humanities, consider different faiths in religious education, take part in a variety of social and cultural events, and learn about other cultures.
- In lessons that challenge pupils to excel, they demonstrate enthusiasm for learning, but this is not evident in all lessons.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The school is an orderly environment. Pupils conduct themselves well throughout the day, including at break and lunchtime. They respond positively to the staff who consistently follow the new behaviour management policy. There is typically little low-level disruption in lessons, except in the very few instances where the quality of teaching does not engage the pupils.
- The school's records show improvements in behaviour for individual pupils with particular behavioural needs.
- Pupils' attendance is below average, particularly in Years 10 and 11, but it is improving rapidly due to more rigorous monitoring by senior leaders and their effective actions to reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent.
- Parents, staff and pupils have no well-founded concerns about personal development, behaviour and welfare. Most praise the school's work in this area.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Progress is too uneven across year groups and subjects, especially for disadvantaged pupils and the most able, to sustain the improvements in GCSE results attained in 2014. The results were broadly average, but the school's information indicates that they declined in 2015.
- The proportion of pupils who go on to the next stage of their education, employment, training or apprenticeships is increasing, but remains below the national average. Most-able pupils are not all well prepared to attain the higher levels at GCSE to enable them to progress to appropriate further and higher education.
- Throughout the school, most-able pupils are not challenged sufficiently in all lessons to enable them to make more than expected progress in line with other pupils nationally with the same starting points.
- While disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than previously, their progress remains below that of other pupils nationally. They attain about a GCSE grade less than other pupils nationally in English and mathematics.
- From their different starting points, the proportions of pupils overall who are making and exceeding expected progress in English and mathematics are below average.
- The progress of pupils in alternative provision is in line with others in the school.
- The progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is improving and becoming closer to the progress made by all pupils nationally with the same starting points. This is due to better identification of, and provision for, their specific needs.
- Pupils in Years 7 and 8 are encouraged to read often and this is improving their fluency and understanding. In particular, it is enabling those with low prior attainment to catch up with other pupils in the school. However, across year groups and subjects, pupils are not reading often enough to increase their comprehension.

School details

Unique reference number	112052
Local authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	10002444

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	635
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dilys Vincent
Headteacher	Stephen Tong
Telephone number	01726 874520
Website	www.poltairschool.co.uk
Email address	secretary@poltair.cornwall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 November 2013

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than most secondary schools.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. These pupils are supported through the pupil premium, which is additional government funding.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average and few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- A high proportion of pupils are disabled or have special educational needs.
- A few pupils attend alternative education in the Royal Cornwall Hospital Education Service and Acorn Academy short-stay provision.
- The school meets the government’s floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils’ attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 26 lessons taught by 26 teachers. Most of the lessons were observed jointly with senior or middle leaders. In addition, the inspectors examined pupils' work and listened to a few pupils reading.
- The inspectors held meetings with groups of pupils, teachers, senior and middle leaders, the headteacher, members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority. They also met with some parents.
- The inspectors observed the school's work. They examined a range of documents, including those relating to school improvement planning and the safeguarding of pupils, and information on the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress, attendance, behaviour and welfare.
- The inspectors took account of 43 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View survey and 53 questionnaires completed by members of staff.

Inspection team

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Steve Smith	Her Majesty's Inspector
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