



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection Report

PORTCHESTER COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Unique Reference Number: 116418

LEA: Hampshire

Inspection Dates: 08 – 10 June 2004
Reporting Inspector: Vivien Bailey HMI

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and was deemed section 12 (3) under the same act

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INTRODUCTION

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of Portchester Community School and of the local education authority.

The inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1	Very good
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Adequate
Grade 4	Not adequate

Description of the school

Portchester Community School is an 11-16 school of 855 pupils, located on the outskirts of Fareham in Hampshire. The school has few pupils of minority ethnic origin or with first languages other than English. It draws many of its pupils from a catchment area where a relatively low proportion of adults have received higher education. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is about average. The school has an above average proportion of pupils with special educational needs, who are fully integrated into the school's mainstream provision. The attainment of pupils on entry is below average. The school has achieved the Artsmark Silver award for its arts provision, and was re-accredited for Investors in People in 2003. In its community role the school provides a nursery, a day care centre for the elderly and facilities for community activities seven days a week.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

The school regards its overall effectiveness as good, a view confirmed by the inspection. The school's self-evaluation is broadly effective and identified most of the strengths and some of the weaknesses noted by inspectors. There is a clear vision and direction for the school, which is communicated well to staff, students and parents, and implemented through a high quality strategic plan. There are effective methods for analysing the performance of the school. Achievement and standards are good overall, with good progress by students from age 11 to 16. Teaching is leading to good progress, but there is weaker teaching in some areas. The curriculum is satisfactory at Key Stage 3, but underdeveloped in some respects at Key Stage 4, particularly with regard to vocational education. There is outstanding, fully integrated provision for students with special educational needs. This benefits all students. They are tolerant and demonstrate support and understanding of difference amongst their peers. There is good care, support and guidance for students. Students generally enjoy their school. They feel safe there; have opportunities to develop good health through sport, and also to contribute to the school and wider community. The attitudes and behaviour of most students are good, but there is a high level of exclusions. Attendance is broadly satisfactory. The school provides good value for money.

Grade: 2

Improvement since the last inspection

There has been a rising trend of achievement and good progress made by students from age 11 to 16. There have been improvements in pupils' standards in almost all those subjects where they were below average in the last inspection. The level of challenge for the most able pupils has been significantly improved, through a programme of activities for those identified as gifted and talented.

Grade: 2

Capacity to improve

The school has good capacity to improve. There is an effective management team with a clear vision and values. There are good strategies in place for improvement, including a high quality strategic plan, data analysis, processes for managing staff performance and for improving students' achievements and behaviour. The school has produced a broadly effective self-evaluation report, in which the grades awarded match those given by inspectors.

Grade: 2

What the school should do to improve further

In order to raise standards, the school needs to improve:

- the Key Stage 4 curriculum, particularly with regard to vocational education
- the planning, co-ordination and quality of personal social and health education
- (PSHE), religious education (RE) and Citizenship

- the quality of teaching in weaker areas
- the consistency of teachers' management of students' behaviour.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

The school judges that the standards achieved by the pupils are good, and this is well supported by recent results. Pupils make good progress during their time at the school. On entry to the school standards are below average, but by age 14 pupils achieve standards that are in line with the national average, and these are maintained at GCSE. In some subjects (English, English literature, mathematics, physical education, German and textiles) pupils achieve very good results. Girls achieve better results than boys at Key Stage 4. Although this difference has decreased, it is still greater than that seen nationally. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. The school analyses its test and examination results thoroughly and carefully plans how to improve performance.

Within this strong performance there is variation between subjects. A lack of continuity of staffing has adversely affected standards in some areas. The school is aware of those departments where standards are weaker and is taking steps to improve them.

Grade: 2

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The school evaluates pupils' personal development as adequate overall, a view supported by the evidence. Most students are proud of the school and enjoy being there. In most of the lessons seen, students responded and concentrated well, although in a small number of lessons and in some corridors students were disruptive. The school has a popular system for rewarding good behaviour. There is also a carefully designed programme of sanctions and support to improve unacceptable behaviour. This is understood by the students and is helping individuals to make progress. However, sanctions and classroom methods for improving behaviour are not yet consistently applied by all teachers. Fixed term exclusions, which are high, are used as a last resort after a large range of actions to support uncooperative pupils has failed.

Attendance is broadly satisfactory, although it is below average in Key Stage 4. Unauthorised absence was above average in 2002-03. The school has improved its arrangements for taking action, and follows up all absences immediately with telephone calls to students' homes. There has been some improvement in attendance in the current year. Punctuality to lessons is unsatisfactory.

The students respond well to activities which encourage them to consider moral and cultural themes. There are some limited opportunities for spiritual and moral development and multicultural understanding through the PSHE curriculum, RE and assemblies. Students have benefited from activities relating to the commemoration of D-Day, and enjoy putting on short plays in assembly relating to themes such as drugs awareness. The students display understanding, friendship and acceptance towards their peers with disabilities. Students participate in cultural activities, including the popular steel band. There are good facilities for sport and many pupils take advantage of these opportunities outside of lessons.

Almost all learners take part in planned and supported work experience, as part of an accredited personal development programme which also includes optional community work. There is good participation in a range of opportunities for personal development including

events put on by the Army, residential events at higher education institutions and visits to France and Germany. There are opportunities to take responsibility, such as membership of the school council.

Grade: 3

QUALITY OF PROVISION

The school judges the overall quality of its provision as good, a view confirmed by inspectors.

The effectiveness of teaching is borne out by the good and improving standards achieved by the pupils. The accuracy of the school's assessment of teaching was confirmed through joint observations by inspectors and senior staff. Inspectors observed a number of lessons where the teaching was good or very good, although in a minority it was inadequate. The school has worked hard to maintain the standard of teaching during a period of above average teacher turnover and problems with the recruitment of key middle managers, such as the head of mathematics.

The most successful lessons challenged and inspired pupils. They had clear learning objectives, with well-paced, varied and interesting activities to which pupils responded with enthusiasm. There were good relationships between the teacher and the class, based on high mutual expectations. Questioning was used to stimulate pupils and develop their understanding so that progress was rapid. In less successful lessons, teachers failed to capture the interest of pupils who became uncooperative and made too little progress. In some cases, teachers lacked the appropriate skills for managing classes where attitudes to learning were poor.

Whole school systems for assessment are good, and there is good practice in some departments. The use of assessment by individual teachers to inform their short-term planning is inconsistent.

In Key Stage 3 the curriculum is satisfactory. However, provision for PSHE and citizenship is limited. The Key Stage 4 curriculum has too little provision for vocational and work-related learning and inadequate provision for RE and citizenship. A small proportion of pupils take vocational courses at a local college. The school does not offer any certificated vocational courses that are open to all pupils. This lack of alternative pathways to achievement disadvantages some types of learner. The school offers many additional activities and opportunities in sport, the arts and other areas, and is modifying the curriculum to support its application for specialist status in the performing arts. There is good provision for gifted and talented pupils, including 'fast track' groups and 'master classes' and other activities at universities and colleges.

The school has a strong and developing range of methods for identifying students at risk of underachievement and supporting them. A counsellor works with students with emotional and family problems. Tutors know their students well, and there is good monitoring of progress against personal learning targets and of students' attitudes to learning.

The school makes outstanding provision for students with a wide range of special educational needs who are effectively integrated into mainstream lessons. Special provision includes physiotherapy, and work with students who have impaired language skills. Students are well supported in lessons and in specialist provision by a committed team of learning support staff. There is close monitoring of students' progress against their individual education plans, detailed analysis of their achievements and very good record-

keeping. There is good careers guidance for students with special educational needs, as well as helpful links with further education colleges and effective transition arrangements to further study at 16.

Effective action is taken against bullying, and firm action is taken to address racist behaviour. Older pupils would like more overt action to develop anti-racist awareness in this predominantly white area. The school has innovative methods for working with local primary schools to support children with behavioural and literacy needs before they come to the school. The school is operating appropriate measures for child protection and providing good support for young people in difficult circumstances. Arrangements for careers education and guidance are satisfactory. Strong efforts are made to involve parents and carers in their children's education. The school has good policies and procedures for ensuring the health and safety of students, staff and the community.

Grade: 2

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school judges its leadership and management to be good, a view supported by the inspection. The headteacher has a clear vision and direction for the school which have been communicated and shared effectively with others. There is a drive to raise standards and to make the school the first choice in the community. The governing body share this vision and are supportive and knowledgeable. There is a committed and enthusiastic senior management team, and strategic planning is of high quality. The school's very good links with the community and other educational institutions contribute significantly to learning.

The school is well managed and runs smoothly. Roles and responsibilities are clear, and the management of middle managers by senior staff is becoming more robust. Systems for managing the performance of teaching and non-teaching staff are applied rigorously. There is a systematic programme of observing lessons, although this does not focus sufficiently on the impact of teaching on learners. Data on students' performance are now being used well to evaluate the school's effectiveness and plan for improvements.

The professional development of staff is good. The school has been re-accredited for the Investors in People award, and makes good use of the local education authority's advisory service. Much effective work has been done to build responsibility, accountability and leadership at all levels. However, and despite this good work, lack of consistency remains in the quality of middle management. There are some weaker departments, where expectations are too low and unsatisfactory teaching has not been tackled. Areas of study relating to pupils' personal development, including work-related learning, PSHE, citizenship, and spiritual, moral and cultural development, are not well planned or co-ordinated.

The school provides good value for money. Financial strategic planning is sound. Planned spending for the current year will absorb the substantial surplus carried forward from last year, owing to vacant posts which the school had been unable to fill. Curriculum leaders have a clear understanding of the processes by which budgetary decisions are made. Levels of learning resources are generally adequate. The school is well equipped with computer rooms, although some are unsuitable for this purpose; less use is made of information, communication technology resources in normal teaching rooms than is the case nationally. Accommodation is adequate.

The school complies with statutory regulations, except for a daily act of collective worship and inadequate provision for RE in Years 10 and 11. The school complies fully with statute relating to special educational needs and broadly with the requirements of the race relations

legislation in terms of policies for the promotion of race equality. The school promotes the agenda of 'Every Child Matters' through its ethos and development themes relating to achievement, the learning environment and the learning community, its attention to inclusion, to equal opportunities and to health and safety.

Grade: 2

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