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Mr Simon Brown  
Interim Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Brown

### **Short inspection of Portfield School**

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 2019 with Andrew Buckton, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in May 2015.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Recent changes to the leadership team have not hampered the school in driving forward improvements and ensuring that pupils continue to receive a good education.

Portfield is a welcoming and caring school community. During this inspection we were struck by how everything you do is centred upon meeting the needs of your pupils and to provide the very best for them. Your vision for the school is clear and, together with staff, you are working carefully to bring this vision to life. Many parents are delighted with the care and education their children receive. Comments received by inspectors included: 'the staff are always happy and positive and clearly love what they do' and 'so impressed with the school, very supportive of the whole family'.

The environment is conducive to effective learning and enabling pupils, including the most able, to make strong progress in their learning. Classrooms are well designed to meet the needs of pupils and are calm and inviting places where pupils thrive.

Relationships within the school are impressive. Staff know and understand pupils' needs extremely well. They have strong relationships with pupils and their families, which helps reduce the anxiety of both pupils and their parents. The school's appointment of an adviser for autism spectrum disorder has reaped significant rewards for both staff and pupils. Staff welcome the wealth of knowledge and

expertise of this adviser, who supports pupils well and enables them to enjoy their time in school.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to further improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that staff make clear what they want pupils to learn in lessons and to sustain pupils' motivation throughout lessons. Although some improvements have been made, you are aware that more work needs to be done. Teaching staff comprehend fully the needs of pupils and make good use of information about what pupils know, understand and can do when planning learning. Nonetheless, you have identified that the curriculum content needs to be further developed to ensure that learning makes sense to pupils. You recognise the importance of pupils understanding clearly what they are learning, why they are learning and how connections can be made to new and unfamiliar situations.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included: how the school ensures that pupils are safe and behave well; the effectiveness of leaders in ensuring that pupils receive a high standard of education; how teaching supports good learning; the effectiveness of the curriculum in supporting pupils' academic, social and emotional development; and how well the school prepares pupils for transition and their future destinations. These key lines of enquiry are considered below under 'Safeguarding' and 'Inspection findings'.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. There is a strong culture of safety and security which pervades the school. There is a shared understanding of the need to protect pupils from all potential risks.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is vigilant in their oversight of any child protection issues. Furthermore, there is overwhelming evidence that there is no hesitation by the DSL to escalate concerns and work closely with external agencies when required. This minimises risk to pupils and helps keep them safe.

Staff receive high-quality training and timely updates on keeping pupils safe. For example, staff have undertaken training on child sexual exploitation and how to protect pupils from the influence of radicalisation or extreme views. This means that staff are confident in the action to take if they have any concerns about the safety of a pupil.

You and your governors are aware of the importance of safer recruitment. You ensure that robust checks are carried out prior to staff starting employment in the school.

As a result of the diligence of you and your staff, most parents, who responded via Parent View, are confident that their children are happy, feel safe and are well behaved.

Typical comments made by parents include: 'The staff are amazing and always go the extra mile to support my son,' 'My son is happy to go to school, has confidence and feels part of the Portfield family,' and 'This school has changed my son, he is now happy to go to school.'

### **Inspection findings**

- Across the school, pupils' behaviour and attitudes, in class and around the school contribute to good learning. Staff have high expectations of pupils and are good role models. Well-established routines are in place, which reduce pupils' anxiety and create a calm and harmonious environment. As a result, reports of poor behaviour are rare, fixed-term exclusions are extremely low and pupils enjoy their time in school.
- There have been a number of changes to the senior leadership of the school since the previous inspection. Nonetheless, leadership is strong and the capacity of the school to drive forward identified improvements is strong.
- Leaders, including governors and trustees, have correctly identified that the school development plan needs to be strengthened. The plan does not reflect well enough the improvements leaders have identified or how, when and by whom actions taken are checked to make sure they are having the best outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders keep a careful check on the quality of teaching. They provide helpful feedback to teachers on what is working well and the areas that need to improve. Consequently, teaching is consistently strong.
- Teachers plan activities which typically meet pupils' needs and are carefully linked to their education, health and care plans. This planning enables pupils to make strong progress. For example, pupils are able to access and be successful in acquiring GCSEs and other accredited courses. This prepares pupils well for the next stage in their education, training or employment. However, leaders recognise that teachers consistently providing the highest level of challenge would raise pupils' achievement even further.
- Pupils have access to the full range of subjects in the national curriculum. These subjects are enhanced with a wide range of enrichment experiences. For example, during the inspection, pupils were actively involved with a song-writing activity with a performing arts group for pupils with disabilities. Pupils were excitedly preparing for a performance to their families and friends. Other activities include rock-climbing, horse-riding and trampolining. These develop pupils' self-esteem and raises their self-confidence. The 'Portfield Pacers', a daily running club, is a whole-school activity which brings pupils, staff and governors together as a community. This activity is a firm favourite with pupils and supports their mental health and well-being and helps reduce anxiety.
- While the pupils enjoy their learning and all that the curriculum has to offer, they find it challenging to make links to their learning and apply what they have learned to new and unfamiliar situations. Work viewed shows subjects and topics are too often taught in isolation and are not sequenced well enough. This does not enable pupils to make links with their learning.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they review the content of the curriculum so that pupils are able to build upon, and make links to their learning
- teachers consistently provide the highest levels of challenge to raise achievement further and enable pupils to make even stronger progress
- development plans, which state precisely the priorities for improvement, are carefully and regularly monitored and evaluated for impact by leaders, including governors.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of Autism Wessex, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dorset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jen Southall  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors held discussions with you, members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders and a range of other staff. We spoke both formally and informally with pupils throughout the school day. We met with members of the governing body, the trust and the chief executive officer for the charity which owns the school.

Inspectors made visits with leaders to lessons across both sites to observe pupils' attitudes to learning and to view their work. We took into account 30 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and 28 text messages written by parents. We also considered the views of parents gathered at the start of the day. We reviewed the 35 responses received through the staff questionnaire.

A wide range of documentation was looked at, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, improvement planning, and information relating to pupils' current achievement and progress. Inspectors also checked the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements.