

The Portsmouth Academy

St Mary's Road, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO1 5PF

Inspection dates

26–27 April 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Superb leadership from the headteacher and her senior leadership team has improved all aspects of the school since the last inspection. The school's culture is now very aspirational – pupils develop the resilience needed to rise to the challenge.
- The leadership of teaching is very well developed and has significantly improved teachers' classroom practice. As a result, most teachers have high expectations and are skilled at improving pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- The regional governing body and members of the Thinking Schools Academy Trust effectively challenge school leaders on how the school can further improve.
- Strong relationships, both between teachers and pupils, ensure that pupils actively use lesson time to reflect on their own learning.
- Teaching is effective and meets pupils' needs well. Most lessons are planned at the right level for pupils' differing abilities, and activities are interesting and practical. However, in science there are inconsistencies in teachers' practice so some pupils do not do as well.
- Pupils conduct themselves extremely well in lessons and around the school. They are confident, polite and courteous to one another.
- Most pupils attend regularly, although there is a group whose attendance needs to be further improved.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported in lessons.
- The curriculum is effective in both key stages and provides very good opportunities for pupils' academic and personal development.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding through assemblies and within their lessons.
- The teaching of English and literacy across the school is very effective. Pupils enjoy reading for pleasure and write fluently.
- From low starting points, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress. This is especially the case in English, mathematics, humanities and design technology.
- The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Pupils feel safe and are kept safe because staff understand their responsibilities and know their pupils well.
- The Thinking Schools Academy Trust, the school sponsor, provides effective support to the school. It has helped develop leadership since the last inspection and reviews the level of support needed on a regular basis.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, by:
 - engaging effectively with all parents to establish the importance of high attendance at school and its link with progress
 - carefully analysing the attendance patterns of different groups of pupils in school over time so that interventions can be more accurately targeted and evaluated
 - sharpening the pastoral processes which support pupils who are disengaging from school.
- Further improve the consistency of teaching and assessment, by:
 - improving the teaching in science to match the strong practice already in place in English and mathematics
 - ensuring that teachers have consistently high expectations of all groups, including the least able, on entry.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher, who is well supported by her senior leadership team, has successfully transformed the school to reflect her vision for all pupils to 'aspire and achieve'. This is reflected in the school's culture and ethos, which challenges pupils to aim high and be ambitious while providing appropriate support to improve confidence and resilience so pupils can achieve their goals.
- Leaders have dramatically improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment since the last inspection. They draw continually on effective practice seen in school and share best practice through 'Truly Great Teaching'. As a result, teachers are very open to new ideas, benefit from the discussion and respond well to advice received from senior leaders. Consequently, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently good and continues to improve.
- Senior leaders have tackled the weaknesses in mathematics identified in the last inspection. The new subject leader reviews school performance information effectively, regularly checks the quality of teaching and learning across the department, and has significantly improved pupils' outcomes. As a result, the quality of teaching is engaging and consistently strong.
- Leaders routinely analyse all aspects of their work. They regularly review the curriculum and check the progress of current pupils with middle leaders. Middle leaders take appropriate actions to address pupil underachievement and provide support for colleagues. Over the last two years, this approach has diminished the differences between the progress of all pupils and those who are disadvantaged.
- Leaders use performance management well to improve the quality of teaching across the school. Teachers' targets are clear and rigorous and they are focused on the key elements of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders link these targets to whole-school priorities, and training opportunities are sharply focused on teachers' needs. Leaders' monitoring is focused on helping their colleagues to be successful.
- The curriculum is reviewed regularly and is broad, challenging and interesting. At the same time, it is flexible enough to meet the needs of all pupils. Leaders ensure that the well-planned curriculum provides pupils with a firm foundation for the next stage of their education. Consequently, progress is now significantly above national averages in a range of subjects, including both English and mathematics.
- Leaders have developed a strong culture of reading and there is a continual whole-school focus on literacy across the school, which is driving up standards.
- Leaders use the additional funding well to support pupils who are disadvantaged. There is a good range of support and enrichment activities in place to develop pupils' skills. As a result, current disadvantaged pupils make progress in line with other pupils.
- Leaders make effective use of other additional funding, including that provided to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the catch-up funding in Year 7. The latter is accelerating pupils' ability to read and understand challenging texts and apply basic numeracy skills so they can fully access the school curriculum.

- Leaders have created a programme of personal development which incorporates building self-confidence and self-esteem. The programme provides pupils with an arsenal of strategies so they 'bounce back' from adversity while remaining highly ambitious for their future. This programme incorporates careers and college programmes and is positively influencing pupils' next steps.
- Pupils have various opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. The taught curriculum, together with assemblies and visits from outside speakers, ensures that all pupils learn about world issues, develop a social conscience and respect the differences between religions and cultures within their local community.
- Leaders work closely with their partner primaries, including the Year 6 pupils who are located on site in the Bridge. Leaders are learning how best to support and guide Year 7 boys from September 2017 when The Portsmouth Academy becomes co-educational. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is also building relationships with vulnerable pupils and their families to improve the transition of these pupils.
- Leaders have struggled historically to recruit and retain subject specialists in mathematics and science. Leaders now work closely with Teach First, and the New Horizons Teaching Alliance which is affiliated with the Thinking Schools Academy Trust, to attract suitable candidates.
- Leaders have benefited from the support received from the Thinking Schools Academy Trust. The trust's school executive headteacher has helped to build leadership capacity, while subject advisers have helped develop the curriculum and teaching across a range of subjects. As a result, leaders at all levels are now better equipped to drive school improvement.
- Pupils at key stage 3 are offered a variety of enrichment opportunities as part of their curriculum offer. Some pupils take an active role in sport, art, music and drama productions. Year 7 pupils commented on how much they had enjoyed taking an active role in 'Bugsy Malone' and how much they were looking forward to the next musical extravaganza.
- Leaders recognise that the progress of current pupils in science needs to improve. An action plan is in place but is yet to be fully implemented. Pupils at key stage 4 make stronger progress than those at key stage 3.
- Leaders recognise that more is needed to improve attendance of some groups of pupils and reduce persistent absence. While actions have improved attendance since September, more work is needed with these pupils and their families to remove any barriers.

Governance of the school

- Governance is highly effective. The regional governing body comprises skilled and experienced governors who provide support and challenge to school leaders. They all have a vested interest in improving the life chances of young people in the Portsmouth area. Governors have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have correctly prioritised key areas for improvement, understand what actions are being taken, and are aware how these are adding value. Governors are particularly

pleased with the progress leaders have made both in improving the quality of teaching in mathematics and in pupil outcomes, including outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in both English and mathematics. They recognise that attendance is a school priority.

- Governors visit the school regularly, both formally and informally. They know the school well and carry out their statutory duties diligently.
- Governors routinely review school policies and procedures and listen to staff and pupils' views on future changes through the school's advisory group.
- Governors meet regularly with members of the Thinking Schools Academy Trust to review actions taken and progress made towards school improvement targets.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders and managers responsible for safeguarding carry out their roles well and keep pupils safe. Clear and appropriate measures are in place to ensure that leaders check the suitability of staff, and careful records are kept. Leaders are trained in safer recruitment. All staff receive regular updates with respect to safeguarding and as a result, know what to do should they have any particular concerns about a pupil. The school involves outside agencies where necessary to facilitate timely and effective support for vulnerable pupils and their families.
- Pupils feel safe, and the majority of parents believe that their child is safe at school. Pupils are taught how to stay safe and recognise potential dangers associated with social media, drugs and alcohol.
- The school website offers helpful guidance for parents regarding how to best support their child should they be concerned about any safeguarding issues. It also provides details of who to contact and local support groups. Leaders ensure that relevant guidance is shared widely.
- A few pupils are taught at the Harbour School. School leaders are in regular contact to check on their progress, attendance and welfare.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved significantly since the previous inspection, and is now consistently good in almost all subjects in the school. Teachers' strong subject knowledge, effective planning, probing questioning and use of thinking time, in line with school policy, are identifying misconceptions and deepening pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Most teachers have high expectations of their pupils and set challenging activities in lessons. In English and mathematics, teachers consistently plan focused activities which are pitched appropriately to challenge all pupils, irrespective of their starting points. As a result, all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make accelerated progress.
- The school's arrangements for assessing pupils' progress are particularly effective. All

teachers routinely check on progress. In the strongest subjects, such as English, mathematics, history and design technology, teachers' feedback ensures that pupils know how to improve their work. These teachers check that pupils can apply these improvements so that pupils have a clearer understanding as a result. Consequently, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress.

- Leaders' teaching and learning policy reflects their commitment to developing thinking skills as a key element to improving pupils' knowledge and understanding. In every lesson seen during the inspection, pupils spent time reinforcing and reflecting on their learning, so they could identify any gaps in their understanding.
- The weekly tutor programme across the school incorporates literacy and numeracy activities which reinforce pupils' basic knowledge and understanding. Consequently, time in English and mathematics lessons is better focused on deepening and developing pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding.
- There is a strong culture of reading across the school. Pupils read regularly during tutor time and in lessons. They told inspectors that they enjoy reading and are happy to read out loud and explain the context.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well by teaching assistants who ably question and work with these vulnerable pupils in lessons. The SENCo ensures that teachers are aware of individual pupils' needs and how best to support these pupils. As a result of these improvements in support, more pupils are enjoying their learning and attending school more often.
- Subject specialists from the Thinking Schools Academy Trust work with middle leaders to create and deliver a challenging curriculum. Currently, these specialists are working with the mathematics team to stretch the most able at key stage 4, in line with the new GCSE specifications. This is improving and extending the most able pupils' ability to problem-solve effectively.
- Most teachers have high expectations of pupils and regularly require pupils to write extensively within their subjects. Some pupils whose attainment on entry is low do not always start or complete their written tasks, and gaps develop in their knowledge and understanding. As a result, some of these pupils are making slower progress than other pupils at school.
- Where teaching is less effective, for example in science, pupils are set activities which either lack challenge or are not sufficiently engaging. As a result, pupils make slower progress and take less pride in their work. Leaders are aware of this and are taking effective action to ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good in every subject.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils engage well with the taught programme of personal development, which also improves pupils' confidence, self-esteem and resilience. Pupils respect the rights of others and celebrate differences. As a result, the school is friendly and very inclusive.

- Pupils feel very well supported by the pastoral support team. Pupils are taught how to stay safe online and how to avoid potential dangers when using social media. Pupils understand the risks associated with drugs and alcohol. Pupils know who to report concerns to should any arise.
- Pupils are happy at school and proud to be members of its community. Pupils wear their uniform with pride, respect the well-kept, splendid environment for learning and are rarely late for lessons. Pupils told inspectors that the school had improved dramatically in the last few years and the senior team are always available should they need to discuss anything.
- Pupils learn about democracy and the rule of law. They understand how and why decisions are made by those governing modern Britain, and learn how to be responsible citizens.
- The school's taught curriculum covers spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. During a geography lesson, pupils were seen reflecting on their own social conscience as they learned about the causes of world poverty.
- Pupils appreciate the impartial careers advice and guidance they receive. This is helping pupils in Year 11 to think differently about possible career options and raising their aspirations. As a result, pupils are taking challenging next steps into further education, employment and training.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils' conduct, in lessons and around the school, at break and lunchtimes, is excellent.
- Behaviour has improved since the last inspection and school processes ensure that any incidents are dealt with quickly and efficiently. Pupils are clear about the consequences and sanctions associated with specific actions. There are very few incidents of bullying and when it does occur it is dealt with appropriately by staff.
- The systematic approach to behavioural issues is reducing the number of incidents of poor behaviour. Pupils are choosing to focus on receiving a positive school reward, 'habits of excellence' rather than a negative 'demerit'. This is increasing the number of pupils celebrating success at the end of every term.
- Attendance of pupils is improving, although it still remains below that of other schools nationally. The absence levels of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are slowly improving. As a result, persistent absence is reducing but is unfortunately still above the national average. Pupil attendance continues to be a high priority for school leaders in order to reduce the negative impact it has on pupils' progress.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' attainment on entry is below the national average. However, published results for Year 11 in 2016 show that pupils achieved above national-average outcomes. In 2016, overall progress for mathematics and humanities was significantly above the national average. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, were in the top 10% for

progress in English.

- Leaders set challenging targets for pupils and accurately monitor pupils' learning in order to identify and support any who are falling behind. As a result, the progress of current pupils, including the disadvantaged, in English, mathematics, art, graphics and history is strong.
- At each key stage, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities follow a bespoke curriculum appropriate to their individual needs. These vulnerable pupils make progress similar to their peers in lessons. A few pupils benefit from attending an off-site provider, The Harbour School, which provides support and guidance for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. As a result, the progress of this group of pupils is improving and pupils are making progress specific to their needs.
- Additional government funding to support disadvantaged pupils is well spent. Disadvantaged pupils and other pupils with the same attainment on entry, who attend regularly, make similar progress across a range of subjects. Disadvantaged pupils with improving attendance quickly decrease any differences between their progress and that of their peers.
- Many pupils arrive at The Portsmouth Academy unprepared for secondary school because they have low literacy and numeracy scores at key stage 2 and/or are pupils who speak English as a second language. These pupils follow a comprehensive bespoke programme across key stage 3 which helps them to catch up. This programme helps them to access the curriculum due to the rapid improvements they make in their reading ages, comprehension and basic numeracy.
- Pupils at key stage 3 follow a more challenging curriculum. This is making a positive difference, and pupils currently in school are starting key stage 4 with higher standards than their peers did previously.
- Pupils make excellent progress in English across each key stage. English teachers consistently and collaboratively plan, review and assess in the pursuit of excellence, and this is reflected in pupils' workbooks, where there is strong evidence of good progress over time.
- Progress in science is not as strong as in other subjects. Not all teachers routinely check progress, and some pupils' workbooks do not record accurately their learning over time. As a result, some pupils develop gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Leaders are aware of these issues and have actions in place to improve the quality of provision and assessment.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Current Year 11 pupils appreciate the extra support they receive to improve their grades. Pupils also value the impartial careers advice and guidance to help them secure college courses and training places for the year ahead.

School details

Unique reference number	139714
Local authority	Portsmouth
Inspection number	10032902

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	553
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Julie Spurgeon
Headteacher	Natalie Sheppard
Telephone number	02392 812 822
Website	www.pafg.org.uk
Email address	pafg@pafg.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 April 2015

Information about this school

- The Portsmouth Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The academy opened in September 2013 and is sponsored by the Thinking Schools Academy Trust. The lead school is Rochester Grammar School.
- The school was accredited with International Thinking School status in July 2016.
- Following a period of consultation, the academy will be co-educational from September 2017.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by pupil premium funding is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than in other schools nationally.

- A few pupils in key stage 4 attend the Harbour School for additional support with their behaviour.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 36 lessons across a range of subjects and year groups. Twenty-eight of these lessons were joint lesson observations with the school's leadership team. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' written work with school leaders, across a range of abilities, subjects and year groups.
- Inspectors visited five tutor groups and observed an assembly. They met with pupils from Years 7, 9 and 11 and talked to pupils from all year groups in lessons and informally around the school. Inspectors listened to a group of Year 7 and 8 pupils read.
- Inspectors met with the executive principal, the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and newly qualified teachers. They met with the chair and governors from the regional governing body, as well as the chief executive officer from the Thinking Schools Trust and his deputy.
- Inspectors considered the school's policies, including those for: safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, pupil premium and special educational needs. They reviewed the school's self-evaluation, improvement plan, surveys, governing body meeting minutes and a review carried out by the trust. They also looked at records relating to current pupils' progress and attendance, as well as behaviour and exclusion logs.
- Inspectors reviewed the 17 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 11 responses from parents on Ofsted's free-text service. They also reviewed the 39 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and 125 responses from Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.

Inspection team

Caroline Walshe, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Colin Lankester	Ofsted Inspector
Alistair Brien	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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