

Summarised inspection findings

Portland High School

North Lanarkshire Council

11 March 2025

Key contextual information

Portland High School is a local authority non-denominational special school located in Coatbridge. The school caters for secondary-aged young people requiring significant additional support with their learning and wellbeing. The school is part of North Lanarkshire Council's 'We Aspire College' initiative. Young people are selected for placement at Portland High School by a local authority resource group, following a rigorous assessment of their additional support needs. At the time of inspection, 14 young people are attending the school. Most young people reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles 1 to 3. The number of young people attending the school has reduced significantly in recent years. Pupil attendance rates at Portland High School are below the national average for special schools. Exclusion data is above the national average for special schools. The school is led by an executive headteacher, who also has leadership responsibility for a number of special schools and services across North Lanarkshire Council. A deputy headteacher has responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Senior leaders and staff have built positive relationships with young people who attend the school. Staff provide young people with respectful and positive interactions. This is supporting young people to develop their own positive and supportive relationships. Staff ensure young people have their rights respected and that they are treated with dignity at all times. This is impacting positively on the majority of young people through improved engagement with learning. Senior leaders and staff should now work to ensure an increasing number of young people engage positively with educational programmes, particularly those with lower attendance rates.
- Senior leaders and staff work very well with partners to develop alternative learning experiences for young people. These experiences are highly motivating for those young people who engage with these opportunities. Young people are developing important life and vocational skills that they enjoy developing over time. A minority of young people are not engaging with learning programmes on offer. Senior leaders and staff need to develop more bespoke learning experiences to increase these young people's attendance and motivation for learning.
- Staff are sensitive to the needs of young people. They work well to ensure that young people are supported to deescalate distressed behaviours, when they arise. All young people present regularly with low level disruptive behaviours or disengaged behaviours. They can present occasionally with more seriously challenging behaviours. This can impact significantly on young people's ability to learn. School leaders and staff work well with most young people to address challenging behaviour at the earliest opportunity. They do this through adopting restorative approaches and accessing valuable additional support from other agencies.

- The majority of young people work effectively with a high level of staff support. Most teachers refer to prior learning and help young people connect this to new learning taking place. They explain the purpose of learning well. Their instructions are clear and support young people to undertake the task set. However, the majority of learning activities are overly teacher led. Young people need to be supported to build confidence to be curious and develop their higher-order thinking skills. Senior leaders should work with staff to continue to develop more creative approaches to teaching and learning.
- The majority of teachers provide young people with relevant verbal and written feedback on their learning. This is helping young people be clear about their identified next steps. Teachers should now consider how to support young people to understand better what they need to do to be successful in their learning. This should include developing further their use of formative assessment strategies. Young people would benefit from further support to grow their independence in their learning and understand where they are succeeding and the areas requiring more focus. For example, teachers should build in more opportunities for young people to self-assess their learning using agreed criteria.
- The majority of teachers use digital technology well to deliver presentations, display learning and present videos related to the learning activity. In a minority of curriculum areas, teachers use interactive screens very well to increase young people's digital interactions with learning. This is effective in supporting young people's motivation and is leading to a greater interest in the subject area. Senior leaders should now work with teachers to increase consistency in the use of digital technology across all curriculum areas.
- Teachers deliver almost all learning experiences within classroom settings. They encourage young people to share their interests and try to tailor learning experiences that are in line with these. They should now consider how to support young people practise and apply class-based learning in other contexts relevant to their needs such as outdoor spaces and the local community.
- All teachers engage positively in moderation activity within school and across the 'We Aspire College' community of schools. This has focused mainly on moderating and validating National Qualifications. Senior leaders and teachers now need to develop moderation opportunities for all broad general education curriculum areas. This will help teachers to have a shared understanding of national standards and make accurate judgements of when young people have achieved a level.
- Teachers use a range of standardised assessments to support the identification of young people's learning needs. They work well with young people and support staff to discuss skills that young people need to develop to improve their educational experiences, predominantly relating to wellbeing. Teachers are beginning to develop relevant individualised targets for most young people to support their learning. Senior leaders should continue with their plans to improve the overall quality of individualised education programmes that incorporate personalised skills-based targets. In doing so, senior leaders should work with staff to articulate better what the measurable outcomes of success are for young people.
- Teachers plan appropriately over short, medium and long-term timescales across curriculum areas. They work well together to develop learning ideas and use agreed planning formats to record intended learning. Teachers plan appropriately using experiences and outcomes. They use national Benchmarks to help demonstrate whether young people are making expected progress. Senior leaders quality assure teachers' planning regularly, providing helpful feedback. Senior leaders have identified correctly that there is a need to improve the

consistency of teachers' planning. Teachers need to ensure young people are accessing progressive programmes of learning across all curriculum areas.

2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

- Evaluative inspection comments are provided in general terms rather than for different cohorts of learners because of the very small number of young people attending the school. General terms should be understood as appropriate to the young person's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) level.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, the majority of young people are making satisfactory progress in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. A few young people are making good progress. A minority of young people are making limited progress. Their progress is generally impacted negatively by school absence and poor levels of engagement in learning.

Literacy and English

- Overall, the majority of young people are making satisfactory progress in reading and writing. A few young people are making good progress. A minority of young people are making satisfactory progress in listening and talking.

Listening and Talking

- Overall, a minority of young people are making satisfactory progress in listening and talking. They respond well to literal questions about texts and give clear explanations for their answers. They can talk about a variety of genre and make use of vocabulary related to their learning. A few young people can share extensive knowledge and specialist vocabulary about areas of particular interest. Most young people are not yet confident when working with others within a group setting. Young people, outside of sporting and leisure activities, do not participate in enough learning activities which involve meaningful collaborative working or presenting to an audience. Across the curriculum, teachers should incorporate more learning activities that enable young people to develop their listening and talking skills through working collaboratively with their peers.

Reading

- Overall, the majority of young people are making satisfactory progress in reading. They are able to respond to questions about what they have read. They engage with a small variety of fiction and non-fiction texts, particularly in relation to their individual interests and aspirations. However, most young people are not reading for enjoyment. Staff should encourage young people to read for pleasure and make greater use of the library provision in the school and local community.

Writing

- Overall, the majority of young people are making satisfactory progress in writing. A few are making good progress. The majority of young people are developing confidence to write independently. A few produce extended pieces of writing particularly on areas of particular interest. Across the curriculum, staff need to minimise the use of scribing and actively encourage young people to develop their writing skills. Young people would benefit from increased support with their spelling and use of grammar.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, the majority of young people are making satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics.

Number, money and measure

- The majority of young people are confident in using number concepts. They can use multiples, factors, decimals and percentages to solve problems and apply mental strategies. The majority of young people use measurement skills effectively across the curriculum, notably in home economics. Young people need to be supported to engage in more learning activities which provide them with opportunities to apply their number, time and measurement skills in unfamiliar and real-life contexts.

Shape, position and movement

- Overall, the majority of young people are able to identify and describe the properties of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. They can describe accurately the properties of shapes such as angles and symmetry. Young people need to be supported to understand fully the features and properties of three-dimensional objects in real-life situations.

Information handling

- Overall, the majority of young people are able to identify suitable ways to collect data, organise it in a chart and display it using bar graphs, line graphs and tables. Across the curriculum, young people are increasing their confidence in presenting information in a variety of ways. Young people now need to use digital technology more to present information.

Attainment over time

- In the broad general education, a majority of young people are making satisfactory progress with their learning over time, in most areas of the curriculum. A few are making good progress. A minority of young people are making limited progress with their learning over time. This is predominantly because of ongoing challenges with school attendance.
- Since 2022, most young people in the senior phase attain a small number of National Qualifications course and unit awards at National 3 and National 4 predominantly in literacy, numeracy and social studies. There is potential for young people in the senior phase to achieve more. Senior leaders and teachers recognise this area for improvement and have taken positive steps to develop the senior phase curriculum. In 2024/25, most young people in the senior phase are projected to attain a significantly increased number of National Qualifications, including units at National 5.

Attendance

- Young people's attendance is an ongoing challenge at the school. Young people's individual needs and personal circumstances contribute significantly towards them not establishing positive patterns of regular school attendance. Staff work closely with young people, families and partner agencies to support and encourage young people to attend school more regularly. They monitor attendance carefully to identify any changing patterns and respond to emerging

needs. Staff are in regular, often daily contact with young people and families. They undertake home visits and provide transportation for young people. Overall, these interventions have only had minimal impact in improving young people's attendance. Most young people and families feel well supported by staff and believe external factors are the primary reason for poor school attendance. Senior leaders and staff recognise that raising young people's level of attendance is a continuing priority for improvement. They now need to identify and adopt a wider range of creative approaches to help support young people to attend school more regularly. Senior leaders and staff, supported by local authority colleagues, need to provide more bespoke additional support for a minority of young people who are currently on part-time learning programmes. Increased consideration should be given to using the wider 'We Aspire College' staff and resources more prominently in supporting young people with their attendance.

Overall quality of achievement

- Staff work well with partners in the local community to enable young people to demonstrate achievement from their learning experiences. Young people are demonstrating valuable skills in communication, resilience and taking on responsibility. They would benefit from participating in wider achievement learning experiences that build their leadership skills and enable them to demonstrate collaborative working skills with their peers.
- Most young people achieve a small number of accredited awards to recognise their personal achievements including Duke of Edinburgh's Awards, John Muir Awards and Junior Award Scheme for Schools. Staff should continue to identify ways to recognise and accredit young people's personal achievements.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders and staff have a strong understanding of the additional support needs and socio-economic background of young people and their families. Staff provide targeted, equitable support to help alleviate any challenges faced by young people and families in relation to the cost of the school day. A proportion of the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) allocation is used well to support parental engagement. Senior leaders use PEF to provide targeted interventions for identified young people and families, including those experiencing deprivation. Senior leaders and staff maintain a specific focus on improving young people's wellbeing and developing their skills for life, learning and work. Senior leaders should measure the impact of PEF funded initiatives more closely.
- Since 2020, most young people move on successfully to further education, training or employment when leaving Portland High School. Senior leaders recognised the need to support all young people to move on to positive post-school destinations. Young people are being supported well to identify potential post-school destinations and build employability skills through participating in a 'Developing the Young Workforce' initiative. A number of young people have engaged successfully in work placements. In 2024, all young people moved on successfully into further education or training. Young people need to continue to be supported to develop skills for life and work which will help them to sustain their positive post-school destinations successfully.

Other relevant evidence

- The executive headteacher has set out a clear vision and sense of direction for 'We Aspire College'. She has adopted an early intervention and proactive approach successfully, supported by her senior leadership team. This is supporting young people with social and emotional needs from across North Lanarkshire Council. More young people are being supported successfully within their mainstream setting by a dedicated outreach team. Fewer young people are needing to access local authority special schools, including Portland High School, as a result.
- The school is undertaking a curriculum review at both the broad general education and senior phase. Young people are already accessing more learning activities from specialist subject teachers. Young people in the senior phase are now able to work towards a wider range of National Qualifications and wider awards, offering increased personalisation and choice. The executive headteacher and staff need to monitor and evaluate how well curriculum development is impacting positively on young people's attainment and achievement.
- Young people engage in a wide range of sport and physical exercise-related learning activities. Staff need to ensure that all young people access two hours of quality physical education.
- The deputy headteacher and staff have built positive relationships with most young people and their families. They provide targeted support to identified families to help facilitate parental engagement in the school. An increasing number of parents are participating well in review meetings and engaging in school events, as a result.
- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and young people. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole-school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of young people through food in school. Minor areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.