



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

Portland Place School

December 2021

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School's Details

School	Portland Place School			
DfE number	213/6386			
Address	Portland Place School 56–58 Portland Place London W1B 1NJ			
Telephone number	020 7307 8700			
Email address	admin@portland-place.co.uk			
Head	Mr David Bradbury			
Proprietor	Alpha Plus Group			
Age range	10 to 16			
Number of pupils on roll	194			
	Juniors	12	Seniors	182
Inspection dates	30 November to 3 December 2021			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Portland Place School, founded in 1996, is an independent co-educational day school. It is situated in the centre of London and occupies three buildings, two in Portland Place, and one in Great Portland Street. It is owned and governed by the Alpha Plus Group Ltd. The current headmaster has been in post since 2017.
- 1.2 During the period March to August 2020, the whole school remained open only for children of key workers. During this period of closure, the school provided remote learning materials for all pupils.
- 1.3 In the interests of infection control during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, inspection evidence was gathered partly remotely and partly on-site to reduce contact within the school setting.
- 1.4 In line with the direction given by the Department for Education (DfE) at the time, no evaluation has been made of the nature or effectiveness of any provision made during the period March to August 2020, including its impact on pupils' learning, achievement or personal development. Any concerns relating to pupils' welfare during this period which directly relate to measures implemented by the school have been considered.
- 1.5 During the lockdown period of January to March 2021, all pupils other than the children of key workers or vulnerable pupils received remote learning provision at home.
- 1.6 In 2020 and 2021, public examinations were not held. For pupils who would have been expected to take these examinations, centre-assessed grades and teacher-assessed grades were awarded.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.7 The school aims to encourage aspiration, resilience and a love of learning in a secure, supportive and inclusive environment. Furthermore, it strives to ensure each pupil achieves their best personally, socially and academically and to encourage service to the wider community leading pupils to respect and value its diversity.

About the pupils

- 1.8 Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is broadly in line with the national average. Seven pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school has identified 99 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia, dyspraxia, and spatial and reasoning difficulties. Forty-five of these pupils receive additional specialist help. English is an additional language for 58 pupils, whose needs are supported by their classroom teachers and by additional lessons where appropriate. The school does not identify a group of pupils as being the more able in the school's population.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

COVID-19: Inspection judgements do not cover the period March to August 2020 inclusive.

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 At GCSE in the years 2019 to 2021, performance has confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education in the junior school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are

appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Pupils achieve good results in public examinations.
- Pupils have good levels of knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Pupils' competency in numeracy is variable, while their literacy skills are good and their digital expertise is excellent.
- Pupils apply their skills for learning inconsistently.
- Pupils' achievements in a range of activities are excellent.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.

- Pupils develop high levels of self-awareness and resilience.
- Pupils develop strongly in creativity, and appreciation of the non-material aspects of life, especially in response to the opportunities for drama, art, music and sport.
- Pupils collaborate well in group projects inside and outside the classroom.
- Pupils make excellent contributions to others within the school and to the wider community.
- Pupils embrace the school's approach to diversity and inclusion.

Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- pupils should develop their skills for learning and apply them effectively across the curriculum.
- pupils should strengthen their understanding of diversity and inclusion so that they can contribute more effectively to a harmonious school community.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

3.5 Pupils' achievement at GCSE has shown consistent improvement relative to national trends in the years 2018 and 2019. This picture was reflected in 2020 and 2021, when centre-assessed and teacher-assessed grades were with nearly half of grades being 9 to 7. Examination data provided by the school confirms that all groups of pupils, including those with SEND or EAL, achieved results in line with their abilities. These results are in response to excellent curriculum support and individual modification of

the curriculum. This ensures that pupils receive additional help in organisational skills, numeracy or learning skills, as appropriate. Pupils have responded well to governors and school leaders, who have made a priority in the last four years of enhancing teaching and learning in the school.

- 3.6 Pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills are good. In scientific and technological areas, they are able to use an excellent range of techniques effectively. Pupils similarly used a range of skills in operatic set design, in excellent artwork displayed around the school, and in improvising a samba rhythm in a music lesson. Pupils' mathematical skills are less well developed overall, with some insecure knowledge of terminology. Most pupils write and speak with accuracy and confidence, while others need support to make progress. Pupils are constantly encouraged to show resilience in this area, and to work conscientiously to improve their skills. Pupils know their own strengths and weaknesses and how to improve their work. Teaching provides practical help consistently, offering for example, sentence starters at all stages. Teachers know their pupils well and have detailed plans to ensure that tasks in lessons match pupils' abilities. Strategies devised by the curriculum support department are implemented effectively in almost all lessons. As part of its progress towards accreditation as a dyslexia-friendly centre, the school has devised effective processes for ensuring that the needs of pupils with SEND are met appropriately. A majority of pupils in the pre-inspection questionnaire said that they were able to make good progress at the school in their knowledge, skills and understanding. The previous inspection report recommended that teaching offered more challenging tasks and offered more detailed feedback, and the school has responded well to those recommendations, although there is more scope for still further improvement.
- 3.7 Pupils have generally good communication skills. In lessons they show excellent verbal skills, as seen in an English lesson, where they discussed characterisation and themes in a Dickens novel. Their conversation was fluent and used sophisticated language. Similarly, pupils' listening skills are generally well developed. A debate on King John's actions in a history lesson showed pupils ability to assimilate and build on the ideas of others. Older pupils, in particular, communicate effectively in response to a school culture which encourages free expression. Reading skills are strong, especially in Years 6 to 9, in response to a school-wide initiative to promote literacy, with the close involvement of the library. Likewise, pupils' writing improves as they become more confident through the use of bespoke glossaries and lists of key terms in a range of subjects. Pupils often enrich their active vocabulary because teaching encourages adventurous thinking and the use of interesting synonyms. Older pupils showed this to good effect in a media studies lesson, where they used appropriate technical vocabulary to offer focused critique of a television drama. Other pupils were able to develop their personal voice writing about a bungee jump, showing a good awareness of tone.
- 3.8 Pupils' knowledge and skills in numeracy across the curriculum is variable. Many are able to manipulate figures successfully. Pupils in Year 7 can, for example, identify when they need to convert mixed numbers to improper fractions and then do so correctly. However, some pupils are less confident in applying their numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics.
- 3.9 Pupils progress at a pace suited to their abilities in their lessons and to receive effective feedback on the work they do online. In this way most can review their work and reflect on how to improve. Pupils also offer further reflection encouraged and enabled by being able to view and comment on others' work online. Pupils have effective note-taking habits using digital means. They also use technology, for example, to model theatrical set and costume design. They have developed excellent research skills and the ability to examine critically the status of what they see online. They benefit greatly from the provision by the school of tablet computers to all in Years 6 to 9. Pupils say that the routine use of ICT for remote learning during the public health crisis has widened their knowledge and skills, making them more consistently confident, and aware of the advantages. Since the school closures, around thirty pupils have opted for a hybrid arrangement for their learning. They do most of their lessons online and come into school for practical experience of physical education and science. These pupils respond well to this provision, carefully tailored to meet their needs by the governance and leadership of the school.

- 3.10 Most pupils at all stages have study skills which open the path to independence as they move through the school, including those who have opted for the hybrid scheme. In lessons, pupils are often able to use good levels of analytical skill, and to bring together knowledge acquired over time. In this way, pupils can, for example, offer a hypothesis in a literary criticism exercise and can improvise a twelve-bar blues in music. The leadership of the school has instigated a range of initiatives to encourage this further, including a positive approach in the junior years and follow-up schemes across the age range. In the first year of this initiative, six pupils have successfully embarked on an independent project qualification.
- 3.11 Pupils achieve excellence beyond the taught curriculum, notably in the creative and performing arts, and sport. Pupils reach high levels of performance in the numerous theatrical and musical shows the school puts on, winning recognition from the Independent Schools Association. Members of the school have won individual and team distinction in a range of sports, traditional team games as well as athletics, cross-country, tennis and swimming. A high proportion of those who begin the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme achieve bronze and silver awards. Pupils were recently ranked in the top ten schools in the world in a design competition.
- 3.12 Most pupils are respectful and supportive towards one another and work well in groups. Greater independence and perseverance have grown out of enforced remote learning for many pupils. Pupils generally behave in a way which supports the learning of the whole group. In a Year 7 mathematics lesson, for instance, pupils showed high levels of understanding and empathy towards the learning styles of classmates. Pupils usually work together productively both in the classroom and in activities. They collaborate effectively, as was seen in a Year 10 music lesson, where they produced novel samba rhythms with excellent results. Their attitudes to learning are generally excellent, and they respond positively to the school's ambition to encourage aspiration, resilience and a love of learning.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.
- 3.14 Pupils have high levels of self-understanding and resilience. They have a strong ability to learn from their mistakes. Most pupils regard that as a normal part of the learning process, and so develop strong self-awareness, whether in mastering new skills on the games field or in the classroom. They learn significant self-discipline from working on individual tasks in lessons from Year 7 onwards. This is a habit which enables them to embrace their academic targets and take responsibility for pursuing them. Pupils develop notable levels of self-confidence as they move through the school, in response to coaching and enrichment activities. For example, they take part in the weekly form contributions to the assembly programme, where they present their ideas, learning presentational skills and how to speak persuasively to an audience.
- 3.15 Pupils understand how the decisions they make affect their own success and that of others. Pupils in Year 10 showed a balanced approach to discussing a range of suggestions for the school council to take forward. Older pupils decided collectively the best way to tackle an examination question, after discussing the choices available and articulating the reasons for their choices. Pupils in Year 9 take responsibility for their subject choices at GCSE in the light of advice from the school. In Year 11 pupils are well supported in deciding their next destination through discussion and practice interviews.
- 3.16 Pupils have a highly developed appreciation for art, drama and sport which has a positive impact on their spiritual development. They value the opportunity to be part of performances and to represent the school. Similarly, they demonstrate a good appreciation of the aesthetics of their environment, both the architecture of their location and the ways in which the school is decorated by other pupils

in preparation for religious festivals. Pupils spoke with passion about the sense of achievement after a play, and the spiritual dimension of singing in a choir, even if the music is non-spiritual in character.

- 3.17 Pupils display a strong sense of right and wrong in almost all cases, and they argue forcefully and coherently about issues affecting their lives. Most speak powerfully against any kind of discrimination, for example, and in favour of the rule of law. In a Year 7 history lesson pupils were able to relate the rules in school to their study of Magna Carta, and they could describe the origins of democracy persuasively.
- 3.18 Pupils usually treat one another respectfully and say that they value the relationship they have with those who return that respect. They speak warmly of the sense of belonging that they feel and which they say is the most important feature of being at the school. In recent years there has been a greater emphasis on the house system, and pupils say that they value and benefit from opportunities to join pupil leadership committees, including the charity committee, and volunteering schemes. The Eco-committee, for example, has a sense of achievement in having abolished single-use plastic cups in the school. They have made a difference, which has reinforced their sense of self-worth. In these ways, pupils develop a strong sense of social responsibility, and they enhance their contribution to others in the school.
- 3.19 Pupils make excellent contributions to the lives of others in the school and in the wider community, in line with the school's aim to encourage service, and so to learn to value and respect diversity. Through discussion and frequent pupil surveys they can influence events by their awareness of social, environmental and economic affairs. In Year 11 at Christmas, for example, pupils arranged for gift-giving among pupils to be sustainable, and for donations to charity to be offered as an alternative. They fully appreciate that they are in a privileged position and that this means they have a responsibility to contribute to society. In response to this, pupils derive satisfaction from taking part in a well-established biennial visit to Tanzania, where they relish the chance to give service to others. They also raise funds for a food bank near the school, and many also give their time and energy to volunteering schemes.
- 3.20 Pupils say they almost all value and respect diversity, with the school giving a central place to matters of racial and gender equality, for example, in planning assemblies and special events. The school is a notably international community with 25 languages being spoken as a first language, and the school reflects London's diversity. Pupils show respect for the religious festivals celebrated by their classmates, such as Diwali and Eid al-Fitr. Similarly, older pupils displayed high levels of empathy in a geography lesson on rebuilding destroyed religious buildings, and also in comparing the musical styles of different cultures. A small minority of pupils, however, behave in a way which does not reflect these values, using language carelessly and failing to show consideration for others.
- 3.21 Pupils confirm in discussion and in the pre-inspection survey that they understand how to stay safe, including online. Pupils have a strong understanding of the need for a healthy balanced diet, and inspection evidence confirmed that the food served at school is well planned and nutritious. Pupils appreciate the wide range of sports on offer as part of the enrichment curriculum. In addition to the formal coaching systems which support their academic work, pupils benefit from independent counselling services and mentoring provision. They have a strong awareness of the need to monitor their mental well-being in response to the personal, social and health education programme, which offers education in this area, and the form tutor system, which is responsive to pupil's needs.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Bill Burn	Reporting inspector
Mrs Areti Bizior	Compliance team inspector (Head, GSA school)
Mrs Diane Durrant	Team inspector (Former head, IAPS school)
Mr Jack Williams	Team inspector (Head of sixth form, HMC school)