



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

PORTLAND PLACE SCHOOL

STANDARD INSPECTION

FINAL VISIT

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Portland Place School

Full Name of School/College	Portland Place School		
DCSF Number	213/6386		
Registered Charity Number	N/A		
Address	Portland Place School 56-58 Portland Place London W1B 1NJ		
Telephone Number	020 7307 8700		
Fax Number	020 7436 2676		
Email Address	admin@portland-place.co.uk		
Head	Mr Richard Walker		
Proprietors	Alpha Plus Group		
Age Range	10 to 18		
Total Number of Pupils	362		
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (276 boys; 86 girls;)		
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS):	0	10-11: 13
	3-5 (EYFS):	0	11-18: 349
Number of Day Pupils	362	Capacity for flexi-boarding:	
Number of Boarders	Total:	0	
	Full:		Weekly:
Inspection date	25 Jan 2010 to 26 Jan 2010		
Final (team) visit	22 Feb 2010 to 24 Feb 2010		

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. It consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in February 2004.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as subsequently amended with effect from January 2005, May 2007 and February 2009. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) The quality of education provided (Curriculum)
- (b) The quality of education provided (Teaching)
- (c) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) The welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) The premises and accommodation
- (g) The provision of information
- (h) The manner in which complaints are to be handled

Legislation additional to the welfare, health and safety Standard is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Portland Place is a co-educational day school for 362 pupils aged from ten to eighteen of whom three-quarters are boys. It was founded in 1996 to provide education for pupils from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities. The school occupies three buildings in central London dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, spread across Great Portland Street and Portland Place. The proprietors, the Alpha Plus Group, have oversight of the school, together with around twenty preparatory schools and sixth-form colleges. The school aims: to create a secure, friendly, inclusive and supportive environment that is good humoured, creative and respectful; to ensure that each pupil reaches his or her personal, social, emotional and academic best and moves on to higher education suited to their individual needs and interests; to encourage self-reliance, confidence, independence and individuality; to provide a broad range of curricular and extra-curricular activities; and to teach pupils to value the school and the wider community.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection in February 2004, an additional building has been acquired to accommodate teaching in Years 10 to 13. Additional rooms for information and communications technology (ICT), and to care for pupils who are unwell, have been added, and a new chief executive appointed to the proprietary body. The school began to admit pupils aged 10 in September 2009.
- 1.3 The average ability of pupils in Years 6 to 11 is above the national average. In the sixth form, pupils are generally of average ability nationally. Pupils are entered for GCSE and A-level examinations. Half of pupils continue into the sixth form and are joined by new pupils. Most who leave go to sixth-form colleges or other independent schools. Pupils, drawn from across the metropolis, come from a wide range of backgrounds, including 26 who have English as an additional language (EAL). Four pupils have statements of special educational needs (SEN) and 120 pupils have been identified as having learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD).
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL AND ACTION POINTS

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 Pupils achieve good standards at all ages and are effective learners overall. They gain much from the balanced curriculum and good programme of activities provided, and benefit from imaginative and effective teaching. They make good progress. Pupils with LDD and those with particular talents generally achieve well, although senior managers are aware that teaching which lacks appropriately adapted tasks sometimes hinders these pupils' progress. Pupils are lively and well motivated, but some lack focus in their learning at times. They work well together and have excellent relationships with their teachers.
- 2.2 Pupils' personal development is good and includes excellent cultural awareness. They develop strong social skills, good moral awareness and high levels of self-confidence. The school acknowledges that younger pupils' understanding of public institutions is limited, and that monitoring of pupils' development in this area is not consistent. Pupils support a wide range of charities with enthusiasm. In their development, pupils are supported by excellent pastoral care within a supportive environment. Older pupils mix well with younger pupils, particularly through activities. Arrangements to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety contribute effectively to their care. Pupils' responses to pre-inspection questionnaires, although few in number, were positive about the school, showing particular appreciation of its successful creation of a close community.
- 2.3 Governance is good, and supports the school's aims well. Effective oversight and good planning are combined with generous and realistic financial support. Senior managers identify the school's needs well through good self-evaluation and are supported in this by the wide range of expertise provided by the proprietors. The school has responded successfully to the recommendations of the previous inspection report. Since then significant progress has been made, in the school's curricular provision, the care of pupils, and in the governance and management of the school. The recent introduction of pupils in Year 6 has been implemented highly successfully. Leadership is strong and management is good. Good policies are introduced at all levels, and implemented and monitored successfully. The potential limitations of operating on three sites are largely overcome by effective communication and planning. The school maintains excellent links with parents, who expressed satisfaction with the education provided by the school in pre-inspection questionnaires.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2003, as subsequently amended.

(ii) Recommended action

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

1. Ensure that existing good practice in providing suitable tasks to meet the needs of pupils with LDD or particular talents is adopted in all teaching.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills

- 3.1 Results at GCSE level over the last three years for which comparative data is available have been high in comparison with the national average for all maintained schools. Results at A level have been moderate. Pupils in Years 7 to 11 make good progress over time in relation to their ability, which is above the national average.
- 3.2 Pupils, including those with EAL, achieve well in all subjects, and some achieve excellent standards in class. The school successfully meets its aim to ensure that each pupil reaches his or her academic best. Those in the newly created Year 6 class make excellent progress in lessons. Pupils with particular talents make good progress in some subjects when given additional tasks to challenge them. In English in the sixth form, these pupils respond in great depth to open-ended tasks and questioning, but such achievement is not consistent in all subjects. Those with LDD and/or SEN achieve well. In a few lessons where their learning lacks focus the progress of pupils with LDD is slower. Pupils develop good knowledge, skills and understanding and are generally articulate. Their reasoning skills are well developed. Some pupils show excellent reasoning skills. In GCSE geography, pupils starting a new topic present good hypotheses based on their understanding of earlier work. Pupils' mathematical skills are good and used effectively in other subjects. In A-level physics, pupils calculate accurately the internal resistance of a battery from the gradient of graphs plotted using data from an experiment. Pupils use ICT efficiently, including for research, and imaginatively in art. They develop creative skills to a high degree, with some producing strong musical compositions, art, and design technology work.
- 3.3 Pupils are effective learners overall although some show a lack of confidence in their learning. The school is aware of this and regularly focuses on issues of confidence in its assessment of pupils' progress. They frequently work independently and do so well. Relationships with staff are excellent. Pupils generally work hard and most have good listening skills. They show good focus, especially in the sixth form, in lessons and in activities, although some become easily distracted, hindering their progress. Pupils work together well, including in sports, music and staged productions. Work set for homework is completed well, although work in some files and workbooks remains uncompleted even after teachers ask for it to be finished. Most files are orderly but some contain many loose sheets of paper, liable to be lost or to become disordered. Pupils achieve well in activities, including winning local swimming and netball competitions. Individual pupils represent London schools in national cross-country competitions and in national football trials. They perform well in drama and music.

3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)

- 3.4 A broad and balanced curriculum suits the needs of both boys and girls and supports the aims of the school effectively. In Year 6 the form teacher provides continuity, and pupils benefit from additional teaching by senior school subject specialists. Most teaching takes place in the form room, together with use of sports and science facilities. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 supports pupils' learning well across all areas. It has been expanded to achieve the breadth recommended in the last inspection report, including good provision for pupils to develop ICT skills. There is a wide range of options available at GCSE to supplement the core curriculum. A high proportion of pupils choose at least one creative subject and some choose two. A good number of options are available for study at A level and the school accommodates most requests. Pupils speak positively about the choices they are offered. Pupils' physical development is given generous time. This allows good use of facilities for sport in the neighbourhood. The curriculum is well planned. Good quality subject handbooks and schemes of work give good, although not always consistent, guidance.
- 3.5 Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is good. There are suitable arrangements for the study of citizenship, although those for the study of public institutions are limited in scope. Good provision is made in the sixth form through individual enrichment events, meeting the recommendation of the previous inspection, although pupils' development in this area is not monitored systematically. Pupils receive good careers guidance. Younger pupils receive help through the PSHE programme, meeting the recommendation of the last report. The careers section of the library, presentations and an imaginative initiative enabling pupils to spend a week together at a university at the end of Year 12 provide older pupils with effective help. They comment positively on the good advice they receive.
- 3.6 The needs of those with LDD, SEN or EAL are assessed well and arrangements to meet these are good. Information for use in teaching is provided by a designated member of staff. Pupils receive support outside lessons on an individual basis and in subject 'clinics'. Clubs related to curriculum subjects offer extended challenge for pupils with particular talents but other arrangements are not fully developed. The school is aware of this and has recently implemented plans to appoint a member of staff to co-ordinate identification of pupils' talents, and the monitoring of their development. Setting and small class sizes provide suitable opportunities for pupils' potential to be met through appropriate teaching in many subjects.
- 3.7 There is a good range of clubs that pupils may attend if they wish. Many do so, although the school's location limits the time that some pupils can give to activities. Yearly productions involve a significant proportion of all pupils. Participation in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme has recently been reinstated. There is a varied programme of trips both at home and abroad. The school has an annual activities week in July in which all pupils are encouraged to participate. This encompasses events in the community, including work experience for Year 10 pupils. At other times in the year pupils go out into the community to perform. In sports, pupils with particular talents are actively encouraged to contribute to their local sports clubs in coaching roles, and many do so. Pupils regularly communicate with linked schools in India and South Africa.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.8 Teaching is consistently good and sometimes excellent. It shows good awareness of pupils' aptitudes and needs in accordance with the school's aim to support the individual, and meets them effectively overall. The advantages of small class sizes are capitalised upon frequently to give pupils good individual help. Pupils with LDD and/or SEN feel well supported within the informal and supportive environment of lessons. Much teaching uses good techniques to address these pupils' needs, including appropriately varied tasks and questioning which encourage them to focus their learning successfully, but this is not consistent across all subjects. Some teaching addresses the needs of those with particular talents well. In mathematics in Year 6 such pupils are given additional, more challenging tasks that enable them to make rapid progress, but such strategies are not common to all teaching. Occasions when pupils lose focus in their learning are handled well. The school is well aware of the needs of these pupils and makes effective arrangements to support teachers in addressing them, including, if necessary, appropriate sanctions.
- 3.9 Teaching is well planned and imaginative, and enables pupils to make good progress. Lessons offer a good variety of tasks for pupils and move at a good pace. In biology younger pupils are introduced to the concept of 'selective breeding' by watching a video clip, then proceed to consolidate their understanding well through discussion in which all are required to participate. Homework is set which supports pupils' learning well, but teaching does not always ensure that all tasks are completed by pupils. Group and paired work is used well. Pupils review each other's performances in drama to good effect. Teaching demonstrates high expectations of pupils alongside continual support and encouragement. It is informed by good subject knowledge, which is notably strong in sixth-form teaching.
- 3.10 Resources for teaching are excellent, and include a well-stocked library that makes good provision for pupils of all ages. Its provision of ICT for research and private study is used fruitfully by pupils and is enhanced by additional facilities in the sixth-form centre. The recommendation of the last inspection to improve library provision has been met well. Teaching rooms have excellent ICT equipment and this is used highly imaginatively at times. In music, younger pupils learn the notes of the stave quickly through participation in an interactive game. Teaching accommodation is good, and enhanced by many informative displays and by pupils' art work.
- 3.11 Teaching uses information from nationally standardised tests, in Years 7 to 11, and internal assessment well to identify pupils' needs and potential and to monitor their progress. The small size of teaching groups in the sixth form allows teachers to have good awareness of pupils' potential and progress. Pupils' work is marked regularly in most subjects and marking is of good quality. It gives effective advice for improvement in line with departmental mark schemes. Pupils state that they understand what they need to do to improve. The school has recently initiated a good scheme for pupils to discuss their progress individually with form tutors. This includes self-assessment leading to target setting, designed to aid further development of pupils' confidence in their learning.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

- 4.1 Pupils show good levels of personal development. The school's aim to encourage self-reliance and ensure that pupils develop socially is met successfully. Pupils respond well to the school's encouragement to show respect for all. They demonstrate tolerance at its highest level, stimulated by the cultural mix of the school. Appreciation for the achievements of others in assemblies is warm and supportive. The school gives younger pupils experience of faith systems through the cultural studies programme. Through presentations in assemblies and recognition of the festivals of differing religions represented within the school community, all pupils develop good understanding of the values of religious belief. Pupils develop good moral awareness. Younger pupils understand concepts of fair trade and racial equality well, and older pupils discuss the ethics of stem cell research effectively. Sixth-form pupils in English consider issues of mental health highly sympathetically when discussing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.
- 4.2 Pupils develop strong and resilient social skills. In a busy city environment they mostly act considerately, and are well motivated and confident. Older pupils mix well with younger, giving effective support as sports coaches as well as undertaking responsibility as prefects. A scheme has recently been introduced whereby sixth formers are attached to form groups of younger pupils as mentors. In some instances the scheme works well, with older pupils encouraging Year 6 pupils in a friendly way to develop their literacy skills through spelling games. The role of the mentors is, however, not yet clearly or consistently defined. Pupils of all ages participate together in productions and other activities such as debating, making excellent use of opportunities to cement social links within the school across its different sites. Pupils make good use of opportunities as members of the school council. They show appropriate understanding of public institutions, although this is limited in scope among some younger pupils. Study of other citizenship issues, such as the impact of the forthcoming Olympics on areas of London, enables pupils to develop good degrees of awareness. Pupils support a wide range of charities with enthusiasm through the house system.
- 4.3 Pupils show excellent cultural awareness, participating in a wide range of activities related to their own and other cultures. They speak enthusiastically of their experience of performing in school productions. All pupils in GCSE English participate in some form of performance. In drama, older pupils explore contemporary issues, including cultural identity and redundancy, with great sensitivity and imagination. History trips to France, language exchanges and sporting tours abroad add an international dimension to pupils' understanding. Good use is made of the excellent cultural opportunities available to pupils locally, with trips for whole year groups to the theatre, regular study visits to art galleries and visits to scientific institutions.

4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety

- 4.4 Pastoral care of pupils is excellent and arrangements for welfare, health and safety are good. The recommendations of the previous inspection report have been met. A pastoral structure of three heads of section who oversee year heads and form tutors provides an excellent system of support for pupils. It is key to the school's success in meeting its aim of establishing a secure, friendly, inclusive and supportive environment. Pupils, particularly those relatively new to the school, confirm it to be a friendly and encouraging place. Regular meetings of pastoral teams monitor pupils' well-being. An excellent system of progress reviews and behaviour reports ensures that individual pupils' personal and academic development is reviewed regularly. The code of conduct reflects the school's ethos of respect for others clearly and is in the front of pupils' homework planners. The school's system of rewards and sanctions is carefully constructed and operated in an open manner. It is perceived as fair by pupils. Appropriate sanctions exist for serious misdemeanours.
- 4.5 Pupils feel that teaching and non-teaching staff know them very well, offering good support and advice. Older pupils consider that staff treat them as young adults. Pupils are given suitable opportunities to express their opinions and see the school council as an effective medium for influencing school policy. Senior pupils comment on the natural friendliness typical of relationships between pupils of different ages. These are aided by the vertically organised house system. The school has a good anti-bullying policy and pupils are confident that any such issues are dealt with swiftly and effectively.
- 4.6 Safeguarding arrangements are good. Appropriate training is given to all staff, including those with specific responsibilities, and procedures are understood clearly. Access for those with physical or learning needs is planned for appropriately. Registration of pupils, including sixth formers, is methodical and absence is followed up quickly. The school maintains a suitable admissions register. Appropriate arrangements exist for pupils who feel unwell and an effective first aid policy is in operation. Measures to prevent risks of fire and other hazards are good, and arrangements for health and safety on educational visits are good.
- 4.7 The PSHE programme encourages pupils to be healthy. This includes information and discussion related to healthy eating. The school does not provide food at lunchtimes but assists younger pupils who do not opt to bring a packed lunch to order food from a nearby establishment. Younger pupils eat their lunches under supervision to ensure that all take adequate nourishment. Good use is made of local facilities to encourage pupils in sport. Careful and dedicated planning of the sports programme results in good opportunities for healthy exercise.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

5.1 Governance is good. It supports the school's aims well, particularly its inclusive ethos and emphasis on individuality and independence, by providing the resources necessary to make these aims realistically achievable. The proprietors bring to the school much educational expertise, and recent revisions of systems of oversight have strengthened the contribution they make. These include planned termly governance visits to further strengthen oversight in the various areas in which they have legal responsibility. Policies and procedures in these areas, including child protection, are monitored well, and benefit from the proprietors' expertise. They are adapted appropriately from policies common to all schools overseen by the proprietors to suit the school's individual needs. The proprietors know the school well and are in regular, often daily, contact, providing focused help in a range of areas, such as meeting the needs of pupils with LDD. Planning is devolved to the school but monitored effectively, and supported financially by good structures. The school buildings are maintained well.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

5.2 Leadership is strong and management is good. The aims of the school are met well. Extensive reorganisation of management structures since the previous inspection has resulted in effective systems to initiate and implement policies to meet the school's needs, and to monitor their operation. These structures, including the institution of faculty groupings of subjects, meet the recommendations of the last report in full, and well. They operate smoothly and mostly successfully. Pastoral management is excellent at all levels, contributing much to pupils' personal development and to fulfilling the school's aim to create a supportive environment. Academic management is effective overall, particularly so at senior and faculty level. The management of departments is good, but not wholly effective in a few subjects in ensuring consistency in marking, and provision for the particular educational needs of some pupils in teaching. Planning to meet long-term needs is good and is initiated at departmental level, with these plans being incorporated into the whole-school development plan. All planning is informed by effective self-evaluation. It makes good use of the resources provided by the proprietors. Fluent and systematic communication ensures that the school runs efficiently despite the distance between its three buildings.

5.3 The school secures well-qualified staff who contribute much to the success of the school's aim to encourage the pupils' independence. A good system of staff review has been introduced. This leads to regular training of staff which is well designed to address the school's needs academically, and in the areas of the pupils' welfare, health and safety. Checking procedures to ensure the suitability of staff, volunteers and governors to work with children are robust, and the central register is maintained effectively. The school's aim to create a friendly environment is enhanced by the effective work of non-teaching staff in a variety of administrative and supportive roles, particularly in the smooth running of the school's three sites.

5.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians

- 5.4 The school maintains excellent links with parents. Responses to pre-inspection questionnaires indicate overall satisfaction with the education provided by the school. Parents who responded show high levels of satisfaction with the information provided by the school and its handling of their concerns, its reporting of pupils' progress and the standards of behaviour it encourages.
- 5.5 Communication with parents is regular and highly effective. Individual staff can be contacted electronically by parents, and pastoral managers and form tutors make themselves easily accessible. Reports are sent out half-termly and range from concise effort grade cards to detailed comments on subjects. These provide good quality information. They are supported by termly meetings with staff that are well attended by parents and run effectively. Homework planners, containing a wide range of helpful school information, are used as a further means of communication between home and school. Parents are welcomed to productions and other events.
- 5.6 An active parents' association runs a tuck shop and a second hand clothes shop. It participates in the school's fund-raising for charity and plays an active role in promoting the school's website. Parents elected to represent each year group in the school attend meetings with senior managers. These cover planning of charity events and other organisational matters, and also provide a forum for discussion of issues related to pupils' education.
- 5.7 A detailed and helpful parents' handbook provides clear information on the school in conjunction with the school's website. Both provide required information for parents of pupils and prospective pupils. A newsletter gives important information for the week ahead as well as celebrating achievements by individual pupils and the school as a whole. There is a suitable complaints policy in place which is operated effectively. This has not needed to be invoked recently.

What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the proprietors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Martin Bussey	Reporting Inspector
Mr Neil Mason	Senior Team Inspector (Director of Studies, HMC)
Mr Gareth Price	Senior Team Inspector (Head, SHMIS)
Mrs Lynn Clarke	Senior Team Inspector (Head, GSA)