

Inspection of Co-op Academy Portland

Laird Street, Claughton, Birkenhead, Merseyside CH41 0AB

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 February 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy in school, and they get on well together. They value the warm welcome they receive from caring staff each morning. Pupils are polite and friendly. They understand that leaders and teachers expect them to behave well.

Pupils feel safe in school. They know that staff are ready to listen and support them if they have any worries or concerns. Leaders deal with bullying effectively. Pupils feel valued because staff take time to get to know them well.

Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are starting to benefit from leaders' higher expectations of what they can achieve. However, pupils do not achieve as well as they should. This is because leaders' work to improve the curriculum is incomplete. Children in the early years do not experience a well-designed curriculum that meets their learning needs. They are not well prepared for the demands of Year 1.

Pupils make a positive contribution to their local community in activities such as litter picking and organising food bank donations. Many pupils take full advantage of the wide range of after-school clubs on offer. Leaders ensure that these activities appeal to pupils' broad range of interests.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders, governors and trustees have an ambitious vision for the school. However, their ambition to provide a high-quality curriculum has been beset with difficulties by the upheaval in staffing. This is particularly the case in early years.

Leaders have not ensured that staff in the early years have sufficient expertise. The curriculum is not well established or understood by staff. Many of the activities designed by staff do not make adequate use of the environment and resources to encourage children's independence and interest in learning. Children do not benefit from sufficient opportunities to develop their spoken language and vocabulary. As a result, too few children secure the foundations of knowledge that they need for future learning.

Leaders are currently working with specialists from the trust to improve the curriculum. They have taken a thorough approach and are reviewing each subject in turn. This includes a sharp focus on developing teachers' subject knowledge. This approach has strengthened teachers' use of assessment to address the gaps in pupils' knowledge that have resulted from a weak curriculum over time. In the subjects that have been reviewed, pupils are starting to achieve well. However, there is still much to do.

In some other subjects, the important knowledge that pupils need to learn and the order in which it should be taught are not clear. This hampers teachers when designing learning. In these subjects, pupils do not achieve well. The work to improve the curriculum is slowed because there are few effective subject leaders in place. Within the school, the level of experience needed to provide guidance to teachers so that all subject curriculums are delivered well is limited.

Leaders have strengthened the systems to ensure that pupils' additional needs are identified early and more accurately. Teachers are well trained in adapting their approaches so that pupils with SEND can follow the same curriculum as their classmates.

Leaders have introduced a clearly structured phonics programme. From the early years, children learn to match sounds to letters in daily lessons. However, leaders have not ensured that staff deliver the programme consistently well. Pupils practise their reading with books that match the sounds they know; however, staff do not ensure that some pupils practise their reading regularly enough. Too few pupils read with fluency and accuracy by the end of Year 2.

Recently, leaders have taken steps to encourage pupils to read more widely. Pupils are enthusiastic about the books they read together in class. However, some pupils who are not secure in their phonics knowledge do not benefit from effective support from well-trained staff. This affects their confidence and motivation to read independently.

The atmosphere in the school is calm. Lessons are rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. Pupils who previously struggled to manage their own behaviour benefit from constructive support from teachers. Leaders have been successful in ensuring that pupils attend school more regularly.

Leaders are determined to increase pupils' awareness of their community. Pupils have many opportunities to become involved in interesting experiences that broaden their horizons. Pupils understand that people have different faiths, families and backgrounds and the importance of respect for all.

The school has a significant number of inexperienced staff, but they are benefiting from high-quality professional development and support. However, this does mean that more experienced members of staff, such as school leaders, have to manage multiple responsibilities. Trustees and governors have provided strong expertise to help to bolster the work of those with leadership duties.

Staff feel that their workload and well-being are considered by school leaders. Parents and carers hold the school in high regard.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff receive regular safeguarding training so that they remain vigilant to the signs that could indicate that a pupil is at risk of harm. Staff understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and report any concerns promptly.

Members of the safeguarding team are sensitive to the challenges that many families face. Leaders work creatively with a range of services to secure the support that vulnerable pupils and their families need. Parents appreciate that they can turn to staff at times of crisis.

Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe. This includes learning about online safety and how to avoid risks in the community.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders, including trustees and governors, have not ensured that there are enough suitably skilled and experienced staff in the school, including staff who have the expertise in leading curriculum subjects. This limits the advice and support that teachers receive to deliver curriculums effectively. It also affects school leaders' ability to improve the school swiftly enough. Trustees and governors must ensure that leadership capacity within the school is strengthened to continue to improve the school, particularly the curriculum from the early years to Year 6.
- Leaders' expectations of what pupils should know are not clear enough in some subjects. This hinders teachers when designing learning for pupils and prevents pupils from achieving well. Leaders should ensure that they finalise what pupils should know and remember in these subjects from the early years to Year 6.
- Leaders have not ensured that pupils who fall behind in reading benefit from the support they need from appropriately trained staff to help them catch up. This means that too many pupils lack fluency and confidence in reading by the end of Year 2. This hinders pupils' development of comprehension skills and a love of reading as they progress through the school. Leaders should make sure that pupils, particularly those who struggle the most with reading, receive appropriate support from well-trained staff so that they catch up quickly.
- The curriculum in the early years is not well designed or sufficiently ambitious. Added to this, some staff in the early years are not suitably trained or experienced. This limits children's achievement. Leaders must ensure that staff in the early years are clear about the important knowledge and vocabulary that children need to know and remember in readiness for their future learning. In addition, leaders should ensure that staff in the early years are equipped to deliver the curriculum effectively.

How can I feedback my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	144632
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	10255925
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	180
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Sue Parker-Tantush
Headteacher	Corynne Peace
Website	https://portland.coopacademies.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Co-op Academy Portland became an academy in October 2018. When its predecessor school, Portland Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted in 2016, it was judged to be inadequate.
- Co-op Academy Portland is part of the Co-op Academies Trust.
- School leaders run a breakfast and after-school club.
- Leaders do not currently make use of alternative provision for any pupils.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher and other leaders. They also spoke with subject leaders and other members of staff.
- The lead inspector spoke with six members of the governing body, including the chair of governors and the regional director of the trust. Inspectors also spoke with the chief executive officer of Co-op Academies Trust.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms, at lunchtime and playtimes. They spoke with different groups of pupils to discuss their views of the school, their learning, their behaviour and safety.
- Inspectors checked the arrangements for keeping children safe. They reviewed documentation, checked attendance information and spoke to leaders, governors, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, they discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and reviewed samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult. Inspectors also considered aspects of several other subjects in the school's curriculum.
- Inspectors spoke to parents and considered their views, which were shared through Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. This included the free-text comments received for parents. Inspectors also reviewed the responses to Ofsted's surveys for staff. There were no responses to Ofsted's survey for pupils.
- Inspectors considered a range of documents shared by school leaders and trustees, including the school development plan, external reports and audits, the minutes taken at governing body meetings and leaders' self-evaluation documents.

Inspection team

Janette Walker, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

David Woodhouse

Ofsted Inspector

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