

# Phoenix College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110189
<b>Local Authority</b>	Reading
<b>Inspection number</b>	378057
<b>Inspection dates</b>	22–23 September 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paul Scott HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	57
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ms Becky Tyler
<b>Principal</b>	Ekie Lansdown-Bridge
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	30 April 2009
<b>School address</b>	40 Christchurch Road Reading RG2 7AY
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<b>Age group</b>	11–16
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. Eleven lessons were observed. Meetings were held with students, parents, members of the governing body and college staff. Inspectors observed the college's work, and looked at a range of documents including college policies and procedures and progress tracking information.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the college's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The impact of the college's focus on teaching and learning, particularly on planning and assessment, on outcomes for students.
- The extent to which the college promotes positive behaviour.
- How well the college prepares students for the next stages of learning and life.

## Information about the school

Phoenix College is a special school for boys with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Students come from a range of ethnic heritages and most are White British. All students have a statement of special educational needs. A high proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

The Phoenix College ensures that students have a range of opportunities for success. They quickly settle into the positive atmosphere of the college and the support they receive is much appreciated by the students and their parents and carers. Parents explained that the college gave them real hope.

Students are expected to start to take responsibility for their own behaviour. Behaviour around the college is very impressive and although at times some students do not always engage in their work, this is generally managed very effectively. The trust between staff and students contributes to the good progress students make and the caring ethos of the college. The progress students make in their personal development is particularly striking. Students feel safe in the college and academic progress has a clear upward trend. Starting points for students are typically well below those found nationally. Care, guidance and support for students are outstanding and so students are helped to build confidence and develop their learning skills. This has a significant impact on the progress they make. All students are valued at Phoenix College. The college is inclusive and tackles discrimination effectively. Increasing success in a range of subjects and examinations, including entry-level certificates, GCSEs and BTEC courses, encourages students to develop more mature attitudes and look forward to a range of opportunities when they leave the college. Students develop social, literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills that contribute to their future economic well-being. However, in spite of the college's efforts, the attendance of some students is not good enough. The college is continuing to work hard to improve attendance and staff are aware that they can have a greater impact on the lives of individual students if their attendance improves. Students that attend regularly are successful.

Teaching at its best is very effective but the quality of teaching is not yet consistent and there is not enough focus on assessing progress in each lesson for clear learning outcomes. Teachers focus too much on the completion of tasks and are not always encouraging students to develop more independent learning skills, so students are too reliant on teachers to guide them through the process. The high level of support that is needed when students start in the college is not always peeled away as students develop confidence as well as positive attitudes and approaches.

Leadership in the college is developing well as the Principal has appropriately allowed the senior teachers to develop increasingly analytical approaches to college improvement. The Principal has established a strong ethos and ambition in the

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college and belief in staff to make a real difference. This is driving improvement and is ensuring that staff are highly motivated and expectations for students are rightly increasing. The governing body has worked hard over recent years to make a real difference in the way they operate and increasingly challenge the college leaders to become more analytical and systematic in developing the college. The increasingly systematic approach at all levels, together with positive trends in attainment, demonstrates the college's now good capacity for sustained improvement. The college is aware it needs to fully establish and develop the systems and analysis much further to ensure sustained long-term school improvement and accountability.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Develop teaching further to ensure students' progress is even greater by:
  - making better use of assessment of learning throughout lessons
  - challenging individual students even more so that the pace of learning is increased
  - promoting more independent learning strategies.
  -
- Ensure leaders critically analyse college practice and develop further systematic and coordinated approaches to secure more sustained improvements and accountability.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

The focus on and success in external accreditation has ensured that students have an increasing range of opportunities when they leave the college. Students value learning and usually make the most of the support they receive in lessons. Students and staff have developed very positive relationships and a trust that allows them to build a sense of self-worth and taste success. Many students now achieve GCSE or equivalent grades in a range of subjects including English, mathematics and science. Students also embark upon college courses in Years 10 and 11 with external providers, including NVQs, in a diverse range of subjects such as construction and child care.

Students are now taking entry-level certificates in Year 9 in a range of subjects following increased success of these courses previously in Years 10 and 11. This is one example of how the leaders are increasing the expectations of success and how students are rising to the challenge.

Students' attainment is low but the improving trend demonstrates the increasing progress students make. The college works very hard to ensure students are ready for learning. Students explained that they are listened to, feel valued and are treated with real respect. As a consequence, students feel safe in lessons and are willing to ask questions, ask for help, engage in learning opportunities and are not inhibited by any worries about getting things wrong.

Students have a strong sense of fairness and what is right and wrong. Spiritual,

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moral, social and cultural development is good.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	4
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching in the college is satisfactory overall and is developing steadily. The best teaching has a clear focus on learning, challenging all students with individual support and learning opportunities. This practice is not yet sufficiently consistent. Teachers plan interesting and appropriate experiences but do not always focus enough on progress. Assessment is not yet refined enough to drive up the pace of learning for individuals further. The personal development of students is very impressive. This is not evidenced as well as it could be in college tracking systems. It can at times mask the need to increase expectations still further of academic demands of subjects.

The curriculum is developing well. Students have opportunities that are appropriate to their abilities, and pathways for future learning are reopened for students as they appreciate the need for exam success. Students are enthusiastic about the range of drama, outdoor activities and sporting opportunities that help to ensure they have a wider view of the world. The college camps are popular and help to develop self-esteem and independence. Students explained to inspectors how they enjoyed learning Italian in modern foreign language lessons and developed ICT skills well through business studies courses.

The care, guidance and support of students are key to the success of the college.

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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Through a range of partners and trained staff, students are nurtured to grow and develop a positive outlook on life. Students quickly settle into the positive way of life in the college and quickly taste success and feel valued members of the community. A few students remain with high levels of persistent absence. The college has a very positive impact on students who attend and this increases with the time they spend in the college. The students who do not attend miss out a great deal on the opportunities and success the college has to offer.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leaders have a strategy to build on the strengths each member of the team brings to college improvement, with students’ needs driving the decision making. Progress-tracking systems are building but are not fully utilised to focus the work of the college and identify where interventions have had most impact. Leaders are increasingly concentrating on developing the quality of teaching and learning. There are many strengths in the quality of teaching and leaders rightly acknowledge that these could be used more to spread good practice and ensure the experience of students is improved. The strong personal relationships that staff and students develop and the positive ethos of the college help students to succeed. The college is aware that refining teaching and ensuring a more consistent experience is needed. Staff feel very well supported and feel a part of a whole-college team, with good access to professional development opportunities. The professional development is not yet coordinated sufficiently to ensure developments are brought about across the college.

Governors have worked hard to become a more reflective and systematic body to ensure the college moves forward in an increasingly sustained way. They have rightly asked the college to develop a more systematic approach to its work and are now increasingly able to hold the college to account. Governance is satisfactory but is developing rapidly. Safeguarding arrangements in the college meet the national requirements. The college is very good at promoting inclusion and tackling discrimination.

The college is developing further opportunities for students to contribute to the college and wider community. Students teach local residents ICT skills, showing how the college’s promotion of community cohesion is also now developing. The college engages with parents very effectively and parents told inspectors how they now

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enjoyed hearing from the college and no longer dread a telephone call. The college nurtures the relationship it has with parents and is effective in developing a clear trust to ensure a partnership grows to help students thrive.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Views of parents and carers

The college has developed very positive relationships with its parents. Inspectors met with a number of parents who were able to explain what the college had done for them and their sons. They felt that they were kept well informed about the progress they make and were very pleased with the rapid changes in student attitudes when they came to the college. Parents felt students settled quickly and built confidence and this helped them to develop good learning habits that had a positive impact on their behaviour back home. The parents could only fault the college buildings. They felt that the college made the most of the building. Inspectors agreed, and it is an extremely difficult building to use as a college for students with special needs and/or disabilities and needs considerable improvements that are beyond the usual college responsibilities.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at the Phoenix College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 32 completed questionnaires from parents. In total, there are 57 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	15	47	16	50	1	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	23	72	9	28	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	16	50	16	50	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	38	19	59	1	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	18	56	14	44	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	19	59	13	41	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	31	20	63	1	3	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	18	56	14	44	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	17	53	15	47	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	19	59	13	41	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	50	16	50	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	19	59	13	41	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	20	63	12	38	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the Principal, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



26 September 2011

Dear Students

### **Inspection of Phoenix College, Reading RG5 7JH**

Thank you very much for the warm and friendly welcome you gave to the inspectors when we came to your college. It was very good to be able to talk to you about the college and how it has helped you. It was particularly good to see how most of you were taking increasing responsibility for your own learning and had very positive attitudes in and out of classes.

The college is good overall and you make good progress. You make particularly strong progress in your personal development. Academic progress is also impressive with the range of examinations and the grades you are getting. This is improving each year, and allowing you to access college courses and look forward to an increasing range of opportunities when you leave school.

The staff of Phoenix College provide outstanding care, guidance and support. You appreciate the hard work they put in and respond positively to their work. We have asked the college to refine lessons further and we feel you can achieve even more now, as your positive attitudes and belief in yourselves to succeed are driving your learning. Some students don't attend regularly enough and need to embrace the opportunities on offer further. Those of you who do come to college regularly are most successful.

The Principal, senior leaders, teachers and support staff in the college are working hard to improve the college and make sure that improvements are sustained. Governors have worked behind the scenes to help this process and have had a lot of work to do, but this is beginning to showing results. They are aware that there is still a great deal that can be done. They have shown a determination, however, to make a difference for you.

You have a crucial role in the college community to work together with your teachers for your success. Attending college and participating in lessons as well as working more independently are elements for you to develop further.

I wish you well in all that you do; with continued hard work your success will follow.

Yours sincerely  
Paul Scott  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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