

Phoenix Academy

Brook Farm, Newton Road, North Petherton, Somerset, TA6 6NA

Inspection dates

24–26 September 2013

Overall effectiveness

Adequate **3**

Pupils' achievement Adequate 3

Pupils' behaviour and personal development Adequate 3

Quality of teaching Good 2

Quality of curriculum Adequate 3

Pupils' welfare, health and safety Good 2

Leadership and management Adequate 3

Summary of key findings

This school is adequate

- Students with limited recent success in education cooperate and achieve adequately in suitable activities, although there is still some way to go before their achievement is good.
- Students clearly improve in their personal development and behaviour, but not all have developed high levels of self-control and self-knowledge.
- The curriculum, whilst adequate, is still under development; school leaders recognise the need to make it more relevant to the students.
- Leaders and managers have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, the school has not been operating for sufficient time for them to bring about all their planned changes to improve the quality of students' achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- Good attention is given to the welfare and safety of the students, both in and out of school. Students settle well into the school after a period of interruption in their previous schooling.
- Robust recruitment procedures ensure that students are safeguarded effectively.
- Leaders have ensured that much of the teaching is good and enables the students to re-engage in education.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards)(England) Regulations 2012, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards)(England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was undertaken with half a day's notice. Nine lessons were observed, some were jointly observed with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with leaders, staff and student members of the school.
- No responses to the Parent View online questionnaire were available, but the views of parents and carers were considered. Staff questionnaires were also considered.
- Written evidence was examined, including work in students' books, schemes of work and data on students' progress. The inspector listened to students reading.

Inspection team

Jill Bainton, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Phoenix Academy, previously known as Aethelstan College, is a co-educational, special day school located in a rural setting near Bridgwater in Somerset. It is currently registered to provide education for up to 25 students, aged between 11 and 16 years who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- The school, which opened in August 2008, is now owned by Phoenix Learning and Care Ltd, a company that provides residential care and educational provision in the west of England. The school was closed between April 2012 and April 2013.
- This is the school's second inspection; the first was in October 2009. There are currently five students aged 11 to 14 years of age on the school's roll. Each student has a statement of special educational needs and one student is looked after by the local authority. Most students start at the school with a history of fragmented schooling and display challenging behaviour. The school aims to provide 'a quality educational facility that will nurture and develop each child individually in order for them to achieve to their full potential'.
- The school uses off-site provision for physical education.
- The school applied for a material change as part of the inspection as they wish to reduce the number of students for which the school is registered from 25 to 12.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and assessment so that more is good or better by:
 - ensuring that all teachers make effective use of information about students' progress to plan work which meets individual needs and provides them with appropriate challenge
 - ensuring that practical activities are an integral part of the lessons
 - maintaining the effective use of behaviour management strategies to help some students to exercise self-control and a positive attitude to learning.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that sufficient specialist staff are employed to enable the headteacher to carry out her role more effectively in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning to raise the students' achievement levels
 - implementing the school development plan.
- Further develop the curriculum by:
 - providing specialist teaching of information and communication technology (ICT), design and technology and science
 - introducing more therapeutic elements, such as speech and language support, for students.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Adequate

Students make adequate progress, although teaching overall is good. Most are making adequate progress with their academic learning relative to their starting points in the short time that they have been at the school. Some are making better progress, especially those who have attended the school for slightly longer. Achievement is not good because there is still a need to improve both students' progress and attainment. Evidence of completed work in students' portfolios demonstrates that most students are making progress commensurate with the time they have been at the school; they are doing work which builds more precisely on the skills they already have.

Since the school has re-opened, individual students have joined at varying times, with the longest attending since May 2013. The school carries out appropriate baseline testing in reading, spelling and mathematics using National Curriculum levels when the students first arrive. Some have only joined very recently and, as a consequence, the school has a very limited amount of information on their progress. The majority of students enter the school with levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy which are well below expectations for their age due to lack of school attendance in many cases. Continuous assessment is in place in lessons and this is gradually building an accurate picture of students' rates of progress. There is a strong focus on developing students' communication, reading, writing and numeracy skills, and in these areas those students who have been at the school longest are making good progress. The school has just installed a new computerised online assessment programme, but this is not in use as planned training for staff has not yet taken place.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Adequate

Students' behaviour and personal development are adequate. There is strong evidence that students who joined with very challenging behaviour have made progress in managing their anger, improving their attendance and re-engaging in education. Attendance is now generally good and students are beginning to see the value of their education. One student, who had been at the school for some time, described the school as 'awesome' and confirmed that he likes coming. Others are less positive but have only been with the school for a very short time. Their behaviour has undoubtedly improved as evidenced by the school's records, but some students still have some way to go before they develop levels of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-knowledge that are sufficiently high for them to be able to maintain their self-control and positive attitudes to learning more consistently. The school is implementing its positive behaviour management strategies well and this is having a positive effect on students' behaviour. Relationships are positive with students learning to respect the adults who are helping them. Students say they feel safe and trust the staff to deal with any instances of bullying. There is evidence that, as a result of these improvements in attitudes, behaviour and attendance, students are making better progress in their personal development.

The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is adequate and the school has detailed plans to improve it by providing positive experiences through planned opportunities in the curriculum. Students are learning to accept responsibility for their own behaviour. Their self-confidence and self-esteem are growing and they realise that they are listened to. They are becoming more respectful towards others due to the positive staff role models. Students have well-planned weekly personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) lessons, which help to contribute to their knowledge of their own and other cultures in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony. Students are taken on visits outside the school to help introduce them to democracy, public institutions and what it means to be a responsible citizen. They are developing cultural awareness through, for example, helping to cook a breakfast based

on those of different countries. Through this, students learn to show respect for diverse cultures and to challenge racist views. The school promotes no political affiliation and ensures that balanced views are presented when controversial issues are discussed.

Quality of teaching

Good

Overall, the quality of teaching is good and promotes learning effectively in order to raise the students' achievement, especially for those who have been at the school for some time. Some teaching is not fully adjusted to meet the individual needs of the students, based on a clear understanding on what they already know and can do. This is the case especially for newer students where little assessment information is available. Thus achievement overall is only adequate. The students work in two key stage groups. As a result, they benefit from access to a small group and, in some cases, one-to-one teaching which allows for individual work and opportunities to build up a trusting relationship with staff. Teachers and support staff work very well together as a team. In most cases staff plan and teach lessons that enable students to re-engage with learning and gain new knowledge and skills. The teaching of English and mathematics is effective in helping the students raise their reading, comprehension and numeracy levels. For example, they were able to analyse the characters after watching a short film clip and to manipulate numbers well during a mathematics lesson on fractions. Students benefit from high levels of praise and positive reinforcement from staff for both behaviour and achievement, with a clear valuing of their strengths and positive personal qualities. This helps to re-engage the students and motivate them to learn. Some students confirm that they are learning more since they came to the school. The positive behaviour management system is used well in lessons. The rewards system is used well and valued by the students, who are eager to earn vouchers. Reading has been identified by the school as an area for improvement and there are suitable additional plans to give it high priority.

The use of assessment procedures is at an early stage. Staff are assessing students' standard of work using National Curriculum levels. This information is beginning to be used regularly in lesson planning. Staff are good at providing verbal feedback to the students on how well they are doing and how they can improve their work. Students' work is marked and good verbal feedback also given to students in lessons. Resources are sufficient and are used well to support learning.

Quality of curriculum

Adequate

The quality of the curriculum is adequate and enables students to make adequate progress. The school is still developing a range of teaching and learning activities which meet the needs of the current students who have a wide range of individual starting points. The curriculum is planned with individual lesson plans based on schemes of work which ensure that the learning builds upon previous learning and shows progression throughout the year. The curriculum covers all the required areas of learning for independent schools and is appropriate in meeting the needs of the students in this age range. However, there is currently insufficient specialist teaching for information and communication technology, design and technology and science, even though the current staff are trying to address this issue and suitable schemes of work are in place. PSHCE is taught separately and makes an important contribution to students' personal and social development.

Overall, the curriculum meets the students' statements of special educational needs; but some therapeutic elements, such as speech and language, are only just being introduced. Friday afternoon is spent on an off-site activity, this includes practical sport or an activity as part of the reward system. Students will be given opportunities for accreditation in foundation level GCSE and AQA unit awards. Careers education is provided individually at the school by specialists, and students will be provided with work experience at the appropriate stage, together with access to local colleges. Additional curricular opportunities are to be provided through the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme which is currently being set up. The students have been on several local field trips

and to a local museum. It is planned to extend this range of opportunities during the term.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of students are good. The school's leaders have ensured that all the regulations are met. There is a full range of appropriate policies and procedures for all aspects of students' welfare, including behaviour management, the prevention of bullying, safeguarding, safety both on and off site and first aid, which meet requirements and are being effectively implemented. The required training for all staff in safeguarding is completed within the required time scales and to the appropriate levels. Staff are trained in first aid and all accidents are recorded. All staff are checked for their suitability to work with children and the information is included in the single central register as required. The school pays good attention to risk assessments with thorough assessments of activities both on and off site. Fire safety procedures are very thorough with very regular fire drills, checking of appliances and a detailed fire risk assessment carried out by a professional company. The attendance and admission registers meet the regulations. Health and safety procedures are kept under continuous review by the proprietors.

Leadership and management

Adequate

The leadership and management of the school are adequate and enable students to make adequate progress. Senior leaders provide a safe and pleasant environment in which students can make progress both academically and personally. Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They have plans in hand to make improvements and are clear about what needs to be done to raise standards. They have begun a system of staff performance management. As the school has only been running for a short time, leaders and managers have been concentrating on building up the structure of the school and have not yet devoted sufficient time to fully implement their development plan and to focus on self-evaluation. Due to teaching staff shortages, the headteacher has been teaching part time and, consequently, has had insufficient time to focus on educational development, including monitoring the quality of teaching and learning.

The school provides all the required information for parents and carers, and further communication through an end-of-term report and newsletters are planned for this term. There is a suitable procedure for complaints which parents and carers are aware of. The proprietors have ensured that the independent school regulations have been met, including those for the premises which provide a welcoming learning environment. Staff morale is high and staff training opportunities are increasing. Those parents and carers who contacted the inspector were very positive in their views of the school and the effect it has had on their children. The school applied for a material change to reduce the number of students from 25 to 12. This application was approved during the inspection.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	135673
Inspection number	422791
DfE registration number	933/6216

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Special
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	11–16 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	5
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Phoenix Care and Learning
Chair	Keith Burley
Headteacher	Roz Hagley
Date of previous school inspection	20–21 October 2009
Annual fees (day pupils)	£34,200
Telephone number	01271 318110
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