

# Phoenix College

40 Christchurch Road, Reading, RG2 7AY

**Inspection dates** 15–16 October 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

## This is a good school.

- Leaders and managers have taken teaching and achievement forward. Findings from the improved systems for checking the work of the college are used to challenge teachers to set properly aspirational targets for improvement for each student.
- As a result of a review of its own work, the governing body has recently improved its support and challenge to college leaders and contributes well to better teaching and achievement.
- Behaviour is good throughout the college. Students have positive attitudes throughout the whole day. The college does everything it can to keep them safe.
- The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They participate eagerly in many activities which help them to understand the differences and similarities in lifestyles and beliefs and their responsibilities as citizens.
- Teaching is typically good. Teachers know the students very well and plan activities which are closely matched to each individual's needs.
- From their low starting points, students make good progress. Many gain GCSE passes, Entry Level qualifications or BTEC awards.
- Teaching in the recently established sixth form is good. Students are enthusiastic about attending the sixth form. They welcome the opportunity for more practice of those skills they have learned on the days when they are at the further education college.

## It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough students gain A\* to C passes in GCSE examinations.
- Teachers do not have sufficient opportunities to strengthen their skills in teaching their subjects, for example by observing best practice in high-performing colleges.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed the quality of teaching in five lessons. On two occasions he was accompanied by the Principal. He visited classrooms to look at students' work in their files and he viewed displays about their activities around the building.
- The inspector scrutinised college documents, such as those which demonstrate how it evaluates its own work and plans to improve. He analysed a number of policies, including those which relate to safeguarding students and managing their behaviour.
- The inspector met members of the college leadership team and the governing body. He held a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Governing Body. The inspector spoke with two representatives of the local authority to gain their views of the college's strengths and weaknesses.
- Meetings were held with teachers and with students, to hear their views about the learning activities available at the college, as well as their views about behaviour and safety.
- The views of the 25 members of staff who returned questionnaires were taken into account. No parents responded to the online Parent View survey. The inspector took account of the college's own survey of parental opinion on students' safety.

## Inspection team

Bob Pugh, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- All of the students who attend this college have statements of special educational needs relating to their behavioural, social and emotional needs. Some have been excluded from other settings and others had very poor attendance records before coming to this college.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students who are eligible to receive the pupil premium is much higher than average. This is additional funding made available for students who are eligible for free school meals or are looked after.
- Most students come from White British backgrounds. All speak English as the main language at home. There are no girls on roll.
- Students who attend have homes in Reading and in neighbouring local authorities. Some have long journeys to college each day.
- There have been a number of recent changes of membership to the governing body. The chair and vice-chair of the governing body took up their posts at the beginning of the current term.
- In September 2014, the college established a small sixth form. Students on roll spend part of their week at Phoenix College and the rest of the week in alternative provision at local further education colleges.

### What does the college need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that a higher proportion is outstanding, by strengthening teachers' skills in teaching their subjects through more opportunities for observing highly effective colleagues at work in a range of different, successful schools.
- Improve the achievement of the most-able students so that a higher proportion gain A\* to C GCSE grades, by ensuring that teachers set precise and rigorous targets which encourage each individual to make as much progress as possible in every lesson.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The principal and other members of the college's leadership team are very ambitious for students to behave and achieve well. Leaders are successful in both priorities. As a result of effective monitoring and coaching of staff, leaders have improved the quality of teaching over time.
- The wide range of learning opportunities and activities available is well matched to the needs of students, providing equality of opportunity. College leaders have ensured that every student, including those who travel long distances to the school, enjoy equal access to all resources, including after-school clubs and residential trips.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is good. For example, in an assembly many students confidently read poems they had written in celebration of Black History Month. The college prepares students well for life in modern British democratic society.
- College leaders at senior and other levels regularly review how well everyone is doing in all subjects. They have a very good understanding of how much progress students are making in literacy and numeracy.
- On those occasions when they note that a student is not making expected progress, they plan well-thought-through intervention programmes, which often lead to rapid improvements.
- College leaders have worked closely with the local authority to improve students' attendance rates, and to improve governors' effectiveness. Otherwise, the local authority provides suitably light-touch support.
- Teachers' performance management targets are closely linked to students' achievements and the improvement of teaching. College leaders observe teaching regularly and feedback to staff on strengths and weaknesses. Teachers' targets are adjusted when necessary.
- Good training programmes have helped to improve teaching over time. However, not all teachers have had sufficient opportunities to observe highly successful colleagues elsewhere. This means that their skills in teaching their subjects are not always strong enough to ensure consistently outstanding achievement by students.
- College leaders have developed highly effective systems for ensuring that students are kept safe. These include regular training for all staff, and the introduction of a key-worker system for every student.
- Leaders have ensured a successful start to the sixth form. Students' safety off-site and the quality of provision there are being closely monitored.

#### The governance of the college:

- As a result of recent improvements, including a change of leadership of the governing body, governance is good. Governors are rigorously addressing previous weaknesses which were identified in a recent review carried out in partnership with the local authority. The series of agreed actions means that more effective monitoring of the college is carried out so governors are better informed from interpreting the data on students' and teachers' performance to challenge leaders. The college's leadership team welcomes the challenge which governors now bring. Governors are well informed about students' achievements. They manage the college's finances efficiently, including the additional funding made available to raise participation and achievement. They receive information about teachers' performance management which means they can use resources effectively to promote or reward successful teachers. Governors monitor the college's safeguarding procedures and have ensured that all necessary requirements for protecting students are in place.

### The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

#### Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good in all year groups. They arrive promptly for lessons and quickly settle to work. Interruptions caused by difficult behaviour very rarely occur. When they do, incidents are dealt with efficiently so that the pace of learning never slows.
- Students behave well despite many small and cramped classrooms, corridors and staircases.
- Comprehensive recording of incidents shows that victims and perpetrators are challenged and supported. There is good evidence that many students' behaviour improves during the time they are at college as a result.
- Students say that they enjoy coming to this college because there is more time to discuss their learning with their teachers. They are, rightly, very positive about the helpful key-worker system.

- As a result, students' attendance has improved rapidly in recent terms, and now stands at the average for special colleges nationally.
- The atmosphere of mutual respect throughout the college helps students to feel confident and to do their best. They take great pleasure in representing their college in team games.
- Students enjoy their links with other people in the community. This can be seen in the way they organise sports events for pupils at local primary schools, and when they use money they raise on cross country runs to support good causes in the area.

### Safety

- The college's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Governors and college leaders have done all that they can to ensure the building and site are as safe as possible and staff are rigorously checked prior to appointment.
- Students say that they feel safe at college. They are aware that different kinds of bullying occur. They know who to turn to for help and they are confident that their concerns will be addressed by staff. Students say that they have good understanding of the potential dangers presented by the internet and from social media, because of good teaching of information and communication technology and learning in tutor time about staying safe.
- Staff and parents raised no concerns about students' safety during the inspection. A survey conducted by college leaders earlier in the year demonstrated that parents believe the college does all it can to keep their children safe.
- College leaders work effectively with other professionals to create and monitor plans which keep students as safe as possible at all times.

### The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is typically good at both key stages and in the sixth form and has improved since the previous inspection. There is not enough outstanding teaching in the college because teachers do not always plan precise targets for the most-able students to achieve the highest grades. Consequently, there is a lack of direction for teacher and student to ensure more rapid progress and higher GCSE attainment.
- On a very few occasions, teachers spend too much time explaining what is to be done, as in some mathematics lessons, for example, when students already know how to proceed. In these situations, teachers' lack of confidence and expertise in teaching their subjects is unhelpful to students' learning and their progress slows.
- In every learning activity, teachers create a calm, productive environment. They explain to students that they expect them to work hard and behave well. Students almost always respond positively.
- Teachers mark students' work files regularly and provide good feedback about how well they are doing and what they should improve. Teachers work closely with students in checking and marking work, so teachers are sure about how much each one has understood. Students make good suggestions about their progress and what they have to do next, because they are clear about what is expected of them.
- In all subjects, good literacy and numeracy skills are promoted. The food technology teacher, for example, gave well-pitched feedback to students about sentence construction and spelling, when marking their written work.
- Very precise questioning enables teachers to know how much each student understands. For example, in science, students gained good understanding of the effect of chemicals on the human body from the teacher's skilful questioning. In such situations, the most-able students are well challenged to carry out their own research using the resources available in the classroom.
- Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to the quality of teaching. They support those who need additional help by making sure they know where to look for answers. They ensure that students have all the resources they need for getting to an answer.
- Students' interests are wholly captured by good teaching in physical education and games. This is in spite of the very poor facilities available. They talk animatedly about football matches and other sports.

**The achievement of pupils****is good**

- Students make good progress over time because their rates of attendance have improved. They work hard and receive helpful support from their teachers. Students have clear ideas about the courses they would like to do at Further Education College from the informative careers guidance they receive.
- The most-able students make rates of progress which enable them to gain GCSE passes. The numbers of students gaining GCSE grades has grown over time. However, not enough gain passes at grades A\* to C when they have the ability to do so.
- A very high proportion of students achieve good Entry Level passes and BTEC accreditation, especially for work-related learning and life-skills.
- Students at this college make comparable progress to that made by students in similar settings. College leaders and teachers demonstrate their commitment to raising students' standards of attainment by checking their marking and assessment with colleagues in mainstream schools, so that they can be absolutely sure that their assessment is rigorous and thorough.
- Good role models are provided by sixth formers and former students. One former student returned to advise students to work hard in college because, 'It is hard out there.' Students showed they understood this message when talking about their hopes for the future.
- Very regular checking of students' literacy skills means that their teachers have a very good idea of how well each one is doing. When they notice that someone is falling behind, they intervene quickly, by providing additional teaching, changing the way they plan learning or by introducing new resources. As a result, students' rate of progress picks up.
- There are no variations in the achievement of different groups. Disadvantaged students make progress in English and mathematics which is as good as others at the school and often ahead of those in similar settings nationally. However, both disadvantaged and other students who came to the college at a younger age tend to gain a wider range of accreditation with higher grades, than those who joined during Key Stage 4.

**The sixth form provision****is good**

- In the few weeks since it was opened, college leaders have effectively monitored the progress of students in the sixth form. They visit the alternative provision at the further education college, to ensure that students are attending regularly, achieving well and adopting positive attitudes to their learning.
- Students are very positive about staying on and their behaviour is outstanding. This is because they are highly motivated to learn as much as possible from the well-organised resources and staffing which are available to them. Students feel safe within the school environment.
- Teaching is good because it is focused closely on helping students to improve literacy, numeracy, communication and self-help skills. As a result, students are growing in confidence, and are more able to compete with their peers in the mainstream further education college setting.
- It is too early to comment on students' achievements over time in the sixth form. However, they all know they must work hard to get the job they want at the end of their courses.

## What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school fails to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	110189
<b>Local authority</b>	Reading
<b>Inspection number</b>	447949

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Boys
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	55
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	9
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Paul Isgar
<b>Principal</b>	Ekie Lansdown-Bridge
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 September 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	0118 937 5524
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