

Phoenix Academy

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

Inspection dates

17–19 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Adequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leadership, management and governance of the school are inadequate. Safeguarding requirements are not met and governance is not helping the school to improve.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure and to provide for their welfare, health and safety is inadequate. The school's procedures to ensure pupils' whereabouts when attending alternative providers are inadequate.
- The governing body has not received sufficient training or guidance to enable governors to understand or fulfil their regulatory duties.
- The governing body does not check or monitor the work of senior leaders of the school regularly or robustly enough. Governors have not noticed that, when staff leave the school to undertake outreach work, it has a negative impact on the progress of those pupils who are on the school site.
- The governing body does not ensure that an effective performance management model is in place to improve the quality of teaching. Teachers, including the headteacher, have not had an appropriate formal appraisal of their work.
- Teaching is not consistently good or better so pupils do not make enough progress.
- Not enough pupils are making rapid progress in English and mathematics. Activities held weekly on a Friday are not focused enough on pupils' academic targets in these subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- Good relationships with pupils and their families ensure that communication between school and home is a strength.
- The headteacher and staff care for the pupils and have high aspirations for them to do well in school and have successful careers.
- The headteacher and staff are conscientious in undertaking courses and training in order to improve their teaching.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school must take action to meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('independent school standards') and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Immediately improve the quality and implementation of the school's policies to safeguard pupils and to promote their welfare, health and safety by ensuring that:
 - the governing body regularly checks that the safeguarding of pupils is correctly conducted and appropriately recorded
 - the governing body carries out the appropriate medical checks when employing new staff, as required by the independent school standards
 - school systems for registering pupils when they are timetabled to be off site are robust and accurate, such that pupils' whereabouts are always known
 - school admission and attendance records are kept in accordance with the regulations
 - the school premises are maintained to a high standard to ensure their safe use at all times.
- Improve the quality of the governing body so that the leadership and management of the school is good or better by:
 - providing training and guidance so that governors understand and effectively fulfil their duties
 - ensuring that the school's development and improvement plans are fit for purpose, and are used to drive school improvement
 - providing the headteacher with a formal external appraisal of her work on a regular basis, and using this information to improve pupils' achievement in the school.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, so that pupils make consistently good progress, by ensuring that:
 - the quality of teaching is never less than good and that assessments of pupils' progress are more regular and used to inform teachers' planning
 - the school uses an appropriate performance management model to provide support for teachers and to help them improve their practice
 - teachers have access to good-quality professional development and training on a regular basis that helps them to raise pupils' achievement
 - outreach teaching is completed without detriment to the achievement of pupils attending the school site
 - Friday activities are constructed so that they result in accelerated progress in pupils' learning, particularly in English and mathematics.
- The school must meet the following independent school standards.
 - Ensure that arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school, and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. (Paragraphs 6, 7, 7(a), 7(b))
 - Ensure that there is a written policy on compliance with the relevant health and safety laws, which is implemented effectively. (Paragraph 11)
 - Ensure that admission and attendance registers meet with statutory requirements and represent an accurate record of pupils' attendance, including when pupils are at alternative providers, or being educated by the school off-site. (Paragraph 15)
 - Ensure that appropriate checks confirm a person's medical fitness after they are employed (Paragraphs 17, 18(1), 18(2), 18(2)(c)(ii))
 - Ensure that external lighting is provided in order to ensure that people can safely enter and leave the school premises. (Paragraphs 25, 27, 27(b))
 - Ensure that safeguarding and child-protection information provided to parents and others on the school's website has regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. (Paragraphs 32(1), 32(1)(c))
 - Ensure that information about the particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language is provided to parents, carers and others (Paragraphs 32(1)(j), 32(3), 32(3)(b))
 - Ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role, fulfil their responsibilities effectively, that the independent school standards are met consistently, and actively promote the well-being of pupils. (Paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c)).

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- The procedures to ensure the welfare, health, safety and safeguarding of pupils are inadequate. The protocol for alternative providers to share attendance information with the school is inadequate. When pupils are not in attendance this is not always picked up in a timely manner so that the whereabouts of the pupil can be swiftly followed up to ensure their safety. In addition, the governing body does not sufficiently check and monitor the quality of the admissions and attendance registers.
- Leaders have not ensured that staff performance is effectively managed to ensure that staff are supported to fulfil their role and improve their teaching skills. For the headteacher and staff, the additional demand of being responsible for cleaning the school at the end of a week's teaching is detrimental to their professional development.
- Leaders do not ensure that staff have enough professional development time allocated to them in order to develop their teaching expertise and to share best practice with other teachers. This is hindering pupils' need to make accelerated progress, so that they can catch up with missed learning and attain the highest levels at GCSE.
- The headteacher provides staff with good opportunities to raise and share any concerns that they have. She listens carefully to them and they find her very supportive and approachable. This has a positive impact on staff morale.
- Teachers attempt to keep up to date and have undertaken courses in subject areas that they had not previously taught. They work closely with the examination boards to help ensure pupils' success. However, they have not always been able to attend the training provided by the examination boards due to staff shortages at the school.
- The headteacher and staff work hard and try their best to make the school a kind and welcoming place for pupils.
- In this very small community, teachers and other adults know the pupils extremely well. They can easily detect when pupils are struggling emotionally with the demands of school. They make appropriate adjustments to their support, in and out of lessons, so that pupils are ready to learn again.
- Staff have completed the required training for the safeguarding of pupils. They are well informed about all types of risk to pupils and follow procedures carefully when needed. The curriculum covers all the requirements of the independent school standards. Pupils are encouraged to keep fit and be healthy through regular physical exercise and understanding of the nutritional content of food. The school provides breakfast for those who need it.
- Pupils are adequately prepared for life in a modern democratic society. The teaching of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and citizenship reinforces pupils' understanding of the rule of law and British institutions.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body is not properly trained and governors do not understand their responsibilities.
 - Since the previous inspection, a governing body has been formed to help lead the school. However, members do not have a sufficient understanding of the requirements of the independent school standards and their role to ensure that the school meets them. For example, they have not ensured that the required checks are made, post-employment, with regard to the medical fitness of staff. They have not adequately checked that all aspects of the school's premises are in safe working order, such as external lighting, which was not working during the inspection, despite having been reported.
 - Governors do not sufficiently set the school's strategic direction. The school's development and improvement plans are not fit for purpose. The headteacher has not had an appropriate formal appraisal of her work. The governing body does not hold the headteacher to account for the performance of teachers and pupils, to check for themselves that sufficient resources of good quality are available, and that public money is being well spent. They have not supported or challenged the school's leaders robustly enough about their work. Consequently, statutory guidance has not been effectively followed.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective. The governing body has not ensured that the school has appropriate policies, particularly those relating to child protection and safeguarding, on the school's website. They do not check for themselves that the quality and implementation of matters relating to safeguarding are as good as they are required to be.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The teaching of pupils elsewhere is detrimental to those pupils on the school roll. When a teacher is away from school, doing outreach work, this limits how and what the school's own pupils are taught. It also has a negative impact on the continuity of teaching as staff frequently work one-to-one with pupils. These factors hinder the progress that pupils at the school make.
- The school does not provide pupils with enough opportunities to apply their mathematical and literacy knowledge and skills across other subjects and in real-life activities. In particular, individual pupils' mathematical and literacy development are not sufficiently targeted in the activities completed each week on a Friday.
- Baseline assessments undertaken by the school are accurate and thorough. They include the emotional and developmental needs of pupils as well as their academic abilities. Teachers make good use of this initial information to plan their lessons.
- There are regular assessments of pupils as they complete course units. However, not all staff, or the governing body, have a clear picture about exactly how well pupils are doing in all aspects of their learning. This makes it harder for school leaders to judge how well pupils are being challenged or to intervene and make adjustments if someone is falling behind.
- Staff use questioning to unpick carefully what pupils have learnt and understood. Sometimes the tasks set for pupils to complete are not challenging enough or directly related to a specific learning target. When this happens, learning slows.
- Teachers use the schemes of work provided by examination boards and carefully cross-reference them so that pupils can work for entry-level courses while also aiming for full GCSE courses. This raises pupils' expectations and provides all pupils with formal accreditation for their achievements when they leave the school.
- Teachers' marking is thoughtful and the feedback they provide helps pupils to understand what they need to do to improve their work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate. Pupils are not kept safe because the school does not always know where pupils who are using off-site provision are.
- Pupils understand the different forms of bullying and believe that staff will support them if they feel bullied. The school's procedures for monitoring, recording and reporting on bullying and other forms of misbehaviour are robust.
- The school works hard to teach pupils how to become good citizens. Pupils' spiritual and cultural development is encouraged through reflection and understanding of different themes, particularly on Fridays. Pupils' moral and social development is nurtured throughout the school day using every opportunity that staff can find.
- The school provides an external impartial careers guidance service, which pupils can freely use. Pupils are encouraged to find out about different careers and to visit different places of work.
- Pupils, although sometimes reluctant learners, value their education. They trust the staff to help them to do their best and to be ready to go on to college and the world of work.
- Pupils' attendance and punctuality generally improve at the school because of the good relationships between home and school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. The vast majority of pupils arrive at the school with significant weaknesses in the ability to manage their own emotions and behaviour. Their social skills are also weak.
- The school carefully assesses pupils' behaviour characteristics. Staff work hard to build up pupils' self-confidence and try to help them learn to improve their behaviour management and social skills. Frequently, they are successful.
- Sometimes pupils' behaviour becomes too challenging and dangerous for the school to manage. When this happens, the school continues to provide full-time education for the pupil but not on the school site.

Following this inspection, the school is aware that these arrangements should only be put in place as a stopgap while an alternative school is found. It is also now aware how to record this appropriately on the school's attendance register.

- Pupils try to take part in their learning and not disturb others. Nevertheless, their levels of distress and anxiety can sometimes get the better of them, leading to sudden outbursts of frustration. Staff manage pupils' behaviour very well. As a result, there are very few occasions when staff need to use physical restraint.
- Teachers put considerable time and effort into making attractive and informative displays. However, in momentary outbursts by pupils these are too easily spoiled or destroyed.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- The outcomes for pupils are not yet consistently good. Progress slows for some pupils who do not learn to manage their behaviour well enough. However, most pupils grow in confidence and make appropriate progress in managing their own behaviour. The frequency of emotional outbursts reduces and this enables them to be ready to learn and not distract others from their learning.
- Most pupils make appropriate progress in their studies, but often they have a lot of catching up to do. Pupils generally join the school with English and mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding below those expected for their age.
- A good emphasis is placed on pupils' English and mathematical development. Daily lessons help to improve pupils' basic skills and fill gaps in their learning. Pupils frequently work with staff in small groups and often one-to-one. Pupils appreciate this level of support. Pupils make the most progress where the consistency of teaching staff is maintained.
- Not enough pupils make speedy progress in English, mathematics and science. The activities held each Friday do not focus sharply enough on each individual pupil's academic learning targets. Consequently, these activities do not help drive improvements in pupils' literacy and numeracy skills as much as they could to ensure rapid progress.
- Pupils who stay at the school are effectively prepared to cope emotionally with a future placement at college or work. Taster days at college and work experience placements are used very effectively to help pupils to feel confident and gain workplace skills, preparing them well for life beyond school.
- Pupils gain accredited external examinations and as a result have found suitable further education places on courses leading to career plans that are appropriate to their interests and levels of attainment.

School details

Unique reference number	135673
Inspection number	10008277
DfE registration number	933/6216

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	5
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Phoenix Care and Learning Ltd
Chair	Keith Burley
Headteacher	Roz Hagley
Annual fees (day pupils)	£38,000
Telephone number	01271 318110
Website	www.phoenixlearningcare.co.uk
Email address	rhagley@pici.org.uk
Date of previous school inspection	24–26 September 2013

Information about this school

- Phoenix Academy is an independent co-educational, special day school.
- Phoenix Learning and Care Ltd own the school, which is located in a semi-rural location. It is registered to provide education for 12 pupils aged 11 to 16 years of age, who have social, emotional or behavioural difficulties, placed by referring local authorities. The period of placement is determined by the individual needs of each pupil, linked with their age at placement.
- The school uses off-site provision for physical education.
- The school provides outreach teaching to one of the Phoenix Learning and Care Ltd children's homes.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- At the time of the inspection, there were five male pupils on roll aged between 14 and 16 years. The school is using one alternative provider for one pupil for one day a week. In addition, another pupil attends a local college for one day a week.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was brought forward by the Department for Education due to concerns that it had about the recording of pupils' attendance.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, two class teachers, the educational psychiatrist who works with the school on behalf of Phoenix Learning and Care Ltd, and three members of the governing body.
- The inspector briefly joined a Personal Education Plan meeting for a young person attending the school who is in the care of a local authority. The inspector spoke with two social workers, the educational psychiatrist working with the pupil, the pupil's foster parent and the caseworker from the pupil's home local authority.
- The inspector visited lessons and spoke informally with pupils.
- The inspector visited the alternative provider being used by the school.
- A range of documentation was analysed, including information about pupils' performance, progress and their written work. The school's procedures for safeguarding and for monitoring attendance, the school's improvement planning and those documents that are required to judge if the school meets the standards for independent schools were also scrutinised.
- There were not enough responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online survey, to take into consideration.
- The inspector took account of the views from two parents.

Inspection team

Steffi Penny, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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