

Phoenix College

40 Christchurch Road, Reading, Berkshire RG2 7AY

Inspection dates

13–14 November 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Significant weaknesses in senior and middle leadership have limited the headteacher's capacity to improve the school.
- Safeguarding is not effective. Leaders have not ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders and staff do not record their concerns about pupils' well-being reliably.
- Over time, governors have failed to support and challenge leaders effectively. Governors have not ensured that safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.
- The additional support pupils receive varies in its usefulness and is sometimes ineffective, particularly for the most able pupils.
- Teachers do not use assessment effectively to plan learning that is suitably matched to pupils' learning needs and abilities.
- Pupils make inadequate progress, including the most able pupils. As a result, pupils do not achieve the outcomes of which they are capable.
- Pupils do not attend school regularly enough.
- The curriculum is limited in its scope. Pupils do not study a suitable range of subjects. Some subjects, including religious education, are not taught at all.
- Teachers' typically weak subject knowledge limits their ability to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding across the curriculum.
- Additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is not used effectively because pupils' needs are not well understood. Consequently, their progress is too slow.
- Pupils' positive behaviour is not developed well enough. Leaders have not ensured that staff have the skills and support to manage pupils' behaviour effectively.
- Leaders do not ensure that alternative education arrangements, made for pupils whose behaviour was not successfully managed in school, are suitable or meet pupils' needs. Furthermore, leaders do not ensure that these pupils receive their entitlement to full-time education.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has begun to take firm action to challenge ineffective teaching.
- The interim executive board (IEB) has recently taken urgent action to check and improve safeguarding arrangements.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently review and sharpen safeguarding processes so that:
 - the role of the designated safeguarding lead is clearly understood by leaders and staff
 - all adults know what to do if they have a concern about a pupil
 - leaders systematically record concerns and communications about pupils' well-being, and document their decisions and actions appropriately
 - leaders ensure that appropriate safeguarding and staffing checks are completed before pupils attend alternative education off-site.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management and governance by ensuring that:
 - a sustainable and effective leadership, governance and staffing structure is in place
 - leaders use the newly introduced systems to monitor the progress of pupils effectively, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, so that it is clear what teaching and additional support is working and what is not
 - pupils access a broad, balanced and appropriate curriculum, well suited to their needs
 - leaders reliably analyse information about pupils' behaviour and attendance to inform their actions to bring about improvement
 - additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to improve the progress and outcomes of this group
 - staff receive appropriate training and support so that they have the necessary skills and resources to manage pupils' behaviour effectively
 - leaders, including governors, rigorously evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of any alternative education arrangements
 - all pupils access their entitlement to full-time education.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils, including the most able and those who are disadvantaged, make consistently good progress in all aspects of learning, by ensuring that:
 - all staff have high expectations for all pupils' behaviour and achievement, including the most able
 - teachers have reliable subject knowledge in the subjects they teach
 - teachers make effective use of information, from their assessment of pupils'

progress, to provide suitably challenging teaching that builds on pupils' prior learning and matches their needs

- teaching assistants rapidly develop a clear, successful and consistent role in supporting pupils' learning.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, by ensuring that:
 - pupils attend school regularly
 - the newly introduced policies and procedures for managing pupils' behaviour are understood by all staff and followed consistently
 - staff undertake thorough risk assessments for managing pupils' behaviour and for taking pupils off-site
 - all bullying, racist or homophobic incidents are accurately recorded, acted upon by leaders, and evaluated to inform future provision.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Due to weaknesses in senior and middle leadership, the headteacher is necessarily overly reliant on external support to lead the school's improvement. Leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness is not accurate and too generous. As a result, the school has limited capacity to improve.
- The senior leadership team, which includes two assistant headteachers, is newly established. The deputy headteacher has a short-term, interim post while a permanent deputy headteacher is recruited. Senior leaders are beginning to understand the significant shortcomings in teaching, learning and assessment. However, they have not yet had a positive impact on improving pupils' progress.
- Middle leaders do not have a clear understanding of their role. Subject leaders do not monitor the quality of teaching and learning in their subject areas effectively. English and mathematics leaders do not have plans in place for improving pupils' progress and outcomes.
- Leaders are starting to improve the quality of information they keep about pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. They have recently introduced new systems. A senior leader carefully collates the information and has started to provide helpful reports. However, this information is not being used effectively by the leadership team to identify what action is needed and where to improve pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance.
- The headteacher is currently reliant on leadership support from external consultants and advisers from the local authority to improve the school. External advisers have provided the staff with some helpful training and guidance. As a result, in recent weeks, senior leaders have introduced a range of new management systems and approaches. However, it is too soon to see whether these changes will be successful or sustained.
- Leaders do not use additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils effectively. Leaders have not identified the learning needs of this group of pupils precisely enough. This funding is used inappropriately as it is not used to meet the specific needs of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders' plans lack clarity about how to spend the money and the outcomes they want disadvantaged pupils to achieve.
- The curriculum is not well planned to meet requirements or pupils' needs. While the core subjects of English and mathematics are taught, together with some foundation and vocational subjects, there are some gaps in the programme. For example, pupils do not study religious education and older pupils do not build on earlier knowledge taught in history. Furthermore, pupils have limited choices about what they study.
- Leaders have not ensured that staff have the appropriate skills and support to manage pupils' behaviour effectively. As a consequence, at the time of the inspection, a small number of pupils were not accessing their entitlement to full-time education. Instead, these pupils are assigned only temporary, part-time educational provision, away from the school, which does not meet their needs comprehensively.
- Staff provide pupils with helpful informal support to encourage pupils' spiritual, moral

social and cultural development. Pupils enjoy a range of enrichment activities, such as sailing, climbing and outdoor pursuits. Strong relationships between staff and pupils mean that pupils frequently discuss their feelings and ideas with staff. British values, particularly democracy, are being developed through the 'Student Voice' meetings. Pupils have helped to review the school's behaviour policy and are proud that some of their suggestions have been included in the new approach to behaviour management.

Governance of the school

- Due to weaknesses in governance over time, governors have not ensured that the school fulfils its safeguarding requirements or that pupils' needs are met. Governors have not ensured that senior and middle leadership are consistently effective and reliable.
- The recently established IEB has produced an action plan that accurately pinpoints priority areas for improvement. However, there has not been time to implement this plan to bring about the rapid improvement required.
- The recent safeguarding audit, carried out by the IEB, provides a sound basis for urgent improvement. However, this important work has yet to be completed.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Systems to record concerns about pupils' well-being are not secure. For example, systems to record concerns about pupils' well-being are inconsistent with staff reporting that there are several different ways they might raise a concern. Leaders do not record their actions, decisions or communications about concerns reliably. As a result, leaders do not have sufficient information to be assured that concerns are swiftly identified and rigorously followed up.
- Staff are not sure who has overall responsibility for safeguarding in the school. Staff are uncertain about who they should report their concerns to. The role of the designated safeguarding lead is not securely established.
- Staff have received some helpful training about keeping pupils safe. Staff know pupils well and understand the signs to look for that may indicate that a pupil is at risk.
- Leaders do not undertake all of the required checks when making alternative arrangements for pupils. For example, at the time of the inspection, leaders had not received confirmation that the adults working with pupils in some of the off-site settings had undergone the necessary safeguarding checks.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- High levels of absence and frequent changes in staff have contributed to significant ongoing weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Teachers' assessment of pupils' learning is inaccurate. Teachers do not consider what pupils already know and can do when they plan learning. Teachers do not make effective use of information contained in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans

when they plan teaching and activities. Much teaching has no clear purpose and pupils produce very little work. As a result, pupils' progress is slow.

- Teachers do not use questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding and clarify any misconceptions, before moving teaching on. Pupils are often provided with work that is poorly organised because teachers' subject knowledge is weak, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Teachers do not have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. The most able pupils are not given tasks that challenge them to think hard. Work is often too easy for these pupils. Consequently, the most able pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Teaching does not challenge pupils' low expectations of themselves. For example, pupils show little pride in their written work. Standards of presentation are low and pupils' books have many examples of incomplete work.
- Teaching does not meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils well enough. Pupils' individual learning needs are not well understood. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are not receiving the support they need to achieve well.
- Support from adults is inconsistent in its effectiveness. Sometimes, additional adults make no contribution to supporting pupils' learning because they lack the necessary skills and their assistance is ineffectively planned. However, at times, adults use their knowledge of what pupils can do to provide more effective support. For example, in geography, the teaching assistant's skilful questioning enabled pupils to think deeply about the impact of poverty on a country's economic development.
- Teachers are more confident and skilled when teaching practical subjects, such as food technology. For example, pupils were successfully adapting the ingredients of a spaghetti bolognese recipe to create their own variations. Pupils worked hard and were proud of what they achieved because the lesson was engaging.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- Pupils say that they feel safe at school. They understand the basics of how to keep themselves safe online. For example, they know not to share their passwords with others.
- Breakfast club provides pupils with a relaxed and positive start to the day. Relationships with pupils and staff in these unstructured sessions are warm and friendly.
- Pupils like the way that staff are readily available to talk to them and that staff are interested in them and what they do.
- Pupils receive helpful additional support for their personal development. For example, pupils undoubtedly enjoy the calming presence of the dog in school during canine therapy.

- Despite these positive aspects of pupils' personal development, leaders cannot ensure pupils' welfare and safety, including when attending alternative education off-site, because safeguarding arrangements are not secure or effective. In addition, leaders do not have a clear system for reporting racist, bullying or homophobic incidents. Consequently, leaders do not know how effectively these are managed or whether they are increasing or reducing.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- The new behaviour policy and reward system are not consistently applied by all staff. Teachers' expectations for pupils' behaviour vary considerably. For example, pupils' disengagement from learning, swearing or low-level disruption in class are often ignored. In some classes, pupils just get up and leave the class when the bell rings because the expected classroom routines and expectations are not well established. Pupils say that they like earning rewards for positive behaviour, but this incentive is not yet having a consistent impact on pupils' behaviour overall.
- A system for monitoring behaviour incidents has been introduced very recently. While still in the early stages of development, leaders' initial analysis of this information has led to some promising improvements in the support some individuals receive.
- Some pupils do not come to school regularly enough. Attendance overall is below average for all schools. New systems have very recently been put in place to monitor attendance more closely. Over recent weeks, there have been some early signs of improvement for some pupils. However, it is too soon to see the sustained impact of these initiatives on improving attendance overall.
- Staff have only recently received training from the local authority on how to carry out risk assessments when managing pupils' behaviour and for taking pupils off-site. Currently, leaders remain dependent on the local authority to monitor all risk assessments undertaken by staff.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Progress is too slow for most pupils across the school. Overall, pupils in Years 10 and 11 make better progress than those in Years 7, 8 and 9. However, across the school, work seen in current pupils' books shows many examples where, from their starting points, pupils' progress has declined rather than improved.
- The most able pupils do not make good progress because teaching and the work set for them is not matched well enough to their needs.
- In 2018, half of Year 11 pupils achieved a GCSE grade in both English and mathematics. Furthermore, over time, pupils' outcomes in English have been consistently weaker than those in mathematics. Pupils typically achieve better outcomes in art and biology than in other subjects. For example, last year, biology was the only subject in which all pupils achieved a GCSE grade. The progress of current pupils reflects this inconsistent and concerning picture.
- Many pupils do not succeed in improving their literacy skills. They repeat errors in their

spelling, grammar and punctuation and the quality of their writing does not improve.

- Pupils are not well prepared for the next stage in their education because, typically, half of them leave the school without basic English and mathematics skills.
- Disadvantaged pupils make insufficient progress from their lower than typical starting points because their additional learning needs are not well understood.
- Leaders' plans for what pupils might do when they leave the school are not ambitious enough, although pupils do receive helpful practical support when they prepare to leave the school. In 2018, all pupils left the school with a place at college or in paid employment. However, some pupils' college placements are being reviewed because their academic, social and emotional skills have not been developed well enough for them to successfully maintain their placement.

School details

Unique reference number	110189
Local authority	Reading
Inspection number	10081671

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	43
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Paul Wagstaff
Headteacher	Eleanor Hatchett
Telephone number	01189 375 524
Website	www.phoenixcollegevoice.org.uk
Email address	head@phoenixcollege.reading.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–16 October 2014

Information about this school

- The headteacher was promoted to this post from a senior leadership role within the school in October 2017.
- The full governing body was disbanded in September 2018 and the IEB was established by the local authority. The first meeting of the new IEB was held in October 2018. Membership of the IEB includes representatives from the local authority and two experienced headteachers.
- Phoenix College provides education for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- All pupils currently attending the school are boys.
- A small number of pupils access part-time activities off-site, rather than attending at the school. Currently, the providers of these activities are: Tutor Doctor, Rivers Gym, Reading Kicks, Whitley Amateur Boxing Club and Auto Skills.
- The school receives external support from the local authority, including the senior

school standards officer and the corporate health and safety officer. The local authority has brokered external consultancy support for leaders.

- The majority of pupils in the school are entitled to the pupil premium.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning throughout the school. All observations were carried out with the headteacher or assistant headteacher. A sample of pupils' workbooks was also examined.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, subject leaders, and a group of support staff.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the IEB.
- Inspectors met with pupils to discuss their views about the school and talked to pupils informally about their work and to gather their views. No pupils responded to Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- Inspectors met with representatives from the local authority and the external consultancy.
- An inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative of one of the off-site providers.
- One parent responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors spoke to a small number of parents on the telephone.
- Inspectors considered the views of 12 members of staff who responded to Ofsted's staff survey.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of the school's documentation, including: leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness; minutes of the IEB's single meeting held since the board was established; the school's action plans and notes of the local authority's monitoring visits.
- Safeguarding procedures were reviewed.

Inspection team

Claire Prince, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Maxine McDonald-Taylor

Ofsted Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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