

# Phoenix Academy

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

## Inspection dates

11–13 December 2018

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Over time, governors have accepted leaders' over-generous view of pupils' achievement. They have not held leaders to account well enough so that pupils make good progress.
- Governors have not had sufficient oversight of the school's compliance with the independent school standards. Some standards are not met.
- Teachers do not use assessment to plan appropriately challenging learning for pupils.
- Staff do not have effective strategies to provide sufficient support for pupils' learning needs.
- Teachers do not identify or address pupils' misconceptions well. Pupils sometimes make the same mistakes.
- Pupils do not receive sufficient support for their different learning needs. This reduces the progress that they make.
- Leaders and staff do not have accurate information about pupils' achievement across the curriculum. They do not identify and take action when pupils are underachieving.
- Pupils' understanding of people with different backgrounds and beliefs to their own requires further development.
- Pupils are not able to understand the causes of their negative behaviours or make changes for themselves.

### The school has the following strengths

- The new leaders, working closely with the proprietor, have identified some important improvements.
- Pupils' attendance is good.
- Staff care deeply about pupils. They do all that they can to promote their welfare and personal development.
- Incidents of bullying are rare.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

## Full report

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

- Strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - governors have an accurate understanding of pupils' achievement and the school's compliance with the independent school standards, and use this to hold leaders to account
  - pupils receive ongoing support that addresses their individual learning needs effectively and accelerates their progress
  - leaders and teachers check carefully the progress that pupils make across the curriculum and address underachievement where necessary
  - leaders further develop pupils' understanding of different cultures.
- Improve teaching and secure good outcomes for pupils by ensuring that:
  - teachers use appropriate strategies to provide effective support to address pupils' individual learning needs in the classroom
  - accurate assessment is used to plan appropriately challenging learning for pupils
  - teachers identify and address pupils' misconceptions as soon as possible.
- Equip pupils to understand, manage and improve their own behaviour effectively.
- The school must meet the independent school standards, as set out in the annex of this report.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Over time, leaders and governors have not had an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. Leaders have been over-generous in their assessment of their impact on pupils' achievement, and governors have accepted this too readily. Governors do not have sufficient expertise to challenge leaders about the progress that pupils have made in their learning.
- Leaders and governors have not ensured that all of the independent school standards are met. Governors do not have good enough oversight of the school's compliance with these important legal requirements.
- Provision to address pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has focused mainly on reducing pupils' challenging behaviours. There has not been enough emphasis on addressing pupils' difficulties in speaking, reading, writing and mathematics. Each pupil has an individual education plan. These show that staff want to help pupils with these essential areas of learning. However, the plans do not set out clearly what pupils should do next. The short term aims for pupils' learning are too broad, do not address some pupils' immediate learning needs and do not promote good progress.
- Leaders provide staff with some training that leads to improvements to teaching and learning. Still, this has not enabled teachers to develop sufficient expertise to address pupils' learning needs effectively enough.
- Leaders have improved the curriculum since the last inspection identified weaknesses in this aspect of the school's work. The curriculum now provides pupils with opportunities to learn a broad range of subjects. There is a system in place to check the progress that pupils make in some subjects. However, this does not provide leaders and staff with accurate or helpful information to show what pupils do and do not understand. As a result, staff are not able to identify when pupils are underachieving and adapt the curriculum to improve pupils' outcomes. Currently, pupils are not making good progress across the curriculum.
- Pupils learn about British values and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is now promoted across a range of subjects. Nevertheless, pupils' understanding about people with different beliefs or backgrounds to their own is quite limited.
- Parents and carers value the school and the positive impact that it has had on their children's lives. They appreciate the attention that staff give to their children and the regular information that they receive about life at the school. However, recent and sudden changes to leadership have been unsettling for families. Leaders recognise that they need to strengthen links with parents.
- The new leadership team has established important relationships with the staff team at Phoenix Learning and Care. Together, they have identified essential improvements. For example, they have rightly recognised the need to provide pupils with access to some appropriate therapies. A new therapy team has started to identify how to give valuable support to pupils and training for staff. This work has only recently begun, and it is too early to see any impact on pupils' outcomes.

## Governance

- The proprietor has recently reviewed the governance arrangements and ensured that there are appropriate systems in place to oversee the work of the school. For example, they have recruited a new director of education, who has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Some appropriate plans are in place to strengthen the work of the school. However, it is too early to see the impact of this work.
- Governors have some relevant skills and expertise. There is some evidence that they have used these skills to provide some challenge to leaders, but this has not been of sufficient rigour to ensure that the school provides a good education for pupils.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and staff prioritise and promote pupils' welfare. There is a culture of vigilance, because leaders have ensured that safeguarding pupils is everyone's priority. Staff receive regular training and updates that support them in this work. They report concerns quickly and appropriately. The safeguarding policy meets current requirements and is published on the school's website. This sets out clear guidance for staff to follow if they are worried about a pupil.
- The school works closely with a range of other professionals and families to help keep pupils safe. Staff know pupils, are alert to their needs and act to address any concerns that they have. Wherever appropriate, they work with families to provide the right support and challenge other professionals, to help keep pupils safe.
- There are effective arrangements in place to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. The record of checks on staff suitability meets current requirements.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- Teaching is not enabling pupils to make good progress. Pupils' progress is reduced, because teaching does not match their abilities well enough. Teachers do not use assessments to plan sufficiently challenging learning for pupils.
- There is insufficient emphasis on addressing pupils' individual learning needs. Staff have not identified the next steps that pupils need to make to secure improvements in essential speaking, reading, writing, and mathematics skills and knowledge. Also, they do not use appropriate strategies to support pupils in the classroom. This reduces the progress that pupils make.
- Work in pupils' exercise books shows that teaching is not addressing pupils' misconceptions in good time. Some pupils continue to make the same mistakes. Staff do not support pupils to practise and develop this learning so that they understand and progress well.
- Sometimes learning is suitably interesting and challenging for pupils. When this happens, teachers involve pupils in activities that build on their interests and encourage them to think and find their own solutions. For example, pupils enjoy and remember clearly what

they have learned in practical science work.

- Staff have strong relationships with pupils. They use this well to ensure that pupils participate in lessons and complete work. Pupils' books show that they take pride in their work.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Requires improvement**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff care deeply about pupils. They take time to get to know them and understand the challenges that they face. As a result of these strong relationships, pupils' confidence, motivation and self-esteem have increased and enabled them to participate in school life.
- Incidents of bullying are rare. Pupils know that they can talk to staff and they say that staff will help them if they have a problem.
- Pupils learn how to keep safe and healthy in their personal, social, health and economic education lessons. For example, they can explain how to keep safe on the internet. One pupil said that he knows to play only with his friends when he is playing online games because, 'you don't know if the other people are safe'.
- Staff ensure that pupils attending alternative provision are safe, well cared for and making good progress.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- The school's rewards and sanctions motivate pupils to make the right choices most of the time. This means that incidents of poor behaviour have reduced for most of the pupils. However, pupils are not able to understand the causes of their negative behaviours or make changes for themselves. Consequently, pupils are too reliant on the support of adults for help to manage their challenging behaviours. This is not preparing them well for their future lives.
- Around the school, most pupils show respect for each other and the staff. They are confident to share their opinions and take pride in their school.
- Pupils' attendance is good. Rates of absence are below the national average for special schools.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Requires improvement**

- Pupils are not making good progress across the curriculum. Teachers do not use assessment information well enough to identify and provide challenging learning for pupils in a range of subjects.
- There is not enough appropriate provision in place to address pupils' individual learning needs. As a result, pupils' achievement, especially in speaking, reading, writing and mathematics, is reduced.

- Pupils have made some progress against the objectives set out in their education, health and care (EHC) plans. However, this progress is more evident in pupils' social and emotional behaviours than it is in their learning. Over time, leaders have placed a much stronger emphasis on addressing these aspects of pupils' special educational needs.
- Pupils join the school with very negative experiences from their previous education. Many do not want to attend when they start or have been permanently excluded from their last school. However, over time, pupils' motivation, self-esteem, attendance and confidence have improved considerably.

## School details

Unique reference number	135673
DfE registration number	933/6216
Inspection number	10044991

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	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	11
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Phoenix Learning and Care Limited
Chair	Jon Pain
Headteacher	Patricia Sheridan
Annual fees (day pupils)	£38,000
Telephone number	01271 318 110
Website	<a href="http://www.phoenixlearningcare.co.uk">www.phoenixlearningcare.co.uk</a>
Email address	academy@plcl.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	17–19 November 2015

## Information about this school

- Phoenix Academy is an independent special school. It provides for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, autistic spectrum disorders, and communication and interaction needs. All of the pupils have an EHC plan.
- Since the last standard inspection, there have been significant changes to the leadership of the school. A new headteacher and deputy headteacher took up their posts in November 2018. At the same time, the previous post holders left.
- The last standard inspection took place in November 2015. At this time, the school was judged to be inadequate. A progress monitoring inspection took place in November 2016.

The school met all of the independent school standards during this inspection.

- The school aims to provide 'a high quality, specialist nurturing environment for students'.
- The school has a governing body. The chair of the governing body is also the chief executive officer of Phoenix Learning and Care Ltd.
- Almost all of the pupils are currently in key stage 2.
- The school is using alternative provision at Reach and Otter Head forest school for one pupil.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. This included a particular focus on monitoring the progress that the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection. This was a material change inspection that took place in October 2017. After this, the Department for Education (DfE) required the school to produce an action plan. The DfE accepted the second version of the action plan in May 2018.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and a middle leader, two governors and the director of education for Phoenix Learning and Care. They also spoke to pupils informally.
- Inspectors considered eight responses to Ofsted’s questionnaire for staff and spoke with a number of school staff. There were no responses to Parent View, Ofsted’s online questionnaire for parents.
- The inspectors spoke with four parents and a representative of the local authority on the telephone.
- Inspectors visited lessons in a range of subjects and looked at pupils’ exercise books.
- A wide range of documents were examined. This included minutes of governing body meetings, the school’s curriculum, records of behaviour and bullying incidents, and safeguarding documents.

## Inspection team

Caroline Dulong, lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Martin Bragg

Ofsted Inspector

## **Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements**

### **The school must meet the following independent school standards**

#### **Part 1. Quality of education provided**

- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school—
  - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
  - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
  - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress.

#### **Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school—
  - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
  - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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