



Phoenix College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110189
LEA Reading LEA
Inspection number 278376
Inspection dates 19 June 2006 to 20 June 2006
Reporting inspector Michael Farrell AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	40 Christchurch Road
School category	Community special		Reading
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		RG2 7AY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01189 015524
Number on roll	56	Fax number	01189 015688
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Chris Weavers
Date of previous inspection	22 March 2004	Headteacher	Mrs E Lansdown-Bridge (Principal)

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	19 June 2006 - 20 June 2006	278376

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Phoenix School (formerly Reading Alternative School) educates students who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Around 45% of students are assessed as having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or oppositional defiance disorder. Although the school is designated co-educational, currently, all pupils are boys. The majority of pupils are White British with three pupils being Black or Black British. Unauthorised absence is very high at 17.4% while authorised absence is 11.2% and many pupils come to the school with a legacy of very poor attendance elsewhere. An inspection in 2000 found the school to require 'special measures'. Two years later a further inspection removed the school from the category of 'special measures' but an inspection in March 2004 judged the school to still have 'serious weaknesses'. A monitoring visit took place in December 2004 indicating that, of the five areas needing improvement, reasonable progress had been made in addressing four and good progress in addressing one.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The senior management of Phoenix College see it as a satisfactory school; the inspector judges it to be satisfactory with strong features. Provision for students' personal development and arrangements for care, guidance and support are strengths, leading to students' good behaviour, and good social, moral and cultural development. The curriculum, including the extra activities offered, is wide and suitable and is appreciated by students. Parents value the school greatly, one saying, 'Everyone puts in so much hard work to help get the best for the children - the teachers and the head put everything into this school and we get the rewards back which I thought I would never see in my son'. Standards, achievement, and learning are at least satisfactory and are good for older students. Teaching is satisfactory with some good practice that is rapidly closing the gaps in the students' knowledge. These gaps are the legacy of missed schooling. The school's strategies for addressing poor attendance are meeting with some success for many, but not all, students. Leadership and management are satisfactory with the Headteacher and senior staff giving a clear sense of overall direction and motivation. However, school improvement planning is insufficiently focused on overall priorities. The school offers satisfactory value for money because of the improvement in the student social skills and the removal of barriers that has enabled year 11 students to gain entry to college.

The school has made satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection and demonstrates the capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve attendance, particularly for younger students.
- Develop a more formal, coherent approach to school improvement planning, including related budget monitoring, to highlight overall school priorities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards of attainment when students begin attending Phoenix College are often very low, particularly in literacy. This is because of missed schooling and the students' special educational needs and acts as a barrier to their learning. However, students make at least satisfactory progress during their time at Phoenix and between the ages of 14 and 16 progress is good. Consequently, students achieve well in a range of examinations including General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). For example, GCSE art work is of a good age appropriate standard. Students with particular difficulties with literacy are identified and supported individually, making good progress in reading and spelling. Their writing progress is slower, being satisfactory overall, because this is not such a central focus of sessions. Students' improving academic achievement is supported by the good progress they make in personal development. Students reach suitable behavioural and academic targets set in their carefully developed individual education plans.

There is no evidence of significant underachievement of any group within the school. Students from different ethnic minority groups and those with particular difficulties, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, make similar progress to others.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Moral and social development is good because of the care that the school takes in encouraging and supporting good behaviour. Students learn to reflect on the consequences of behaviour both in lessons and through the school. Students are exceptionally courteous to adults and supportive of each other. Cultural development is good because of the wide range of opportunities offered to raise awareness of different cultures in art, religion, English and other areas. Students' spiritual development is satisfactory. Students have good attitudes to learning, enjoy school and value its support highly, one saying, the school is, 'like a family'.

Attendance is low with a high contribution to absences made by a small number of students who bring a legacy of poor attendance in previous schools and are persistent non-attenders. Some of these students travel from other local authority areas where the school's links with education welfare services are not as close. The school does much to encourage better attendance including monitoring and analysing data, first day calls to parents, and rewards for good attendance. This has had a significant positive impact on the attendance rate of many pupils.

The students move around the school and conduct themselves in lessons safely and are aware of risks and what to do about them, feeling safe and secure in the school. They are aware of healthy life styles, enjoying and doing well in physical education, and some choose salads and other healthy foods at lunchtimes, which are relaxed, courteous and enjoyable occasions. Students contribute to the community well through charity work and strong links with local colleges and workplaces. They make good progress in developing a variety of suitable skills that help their economic well-being. This includes developing close team work, for example in sports, and developing appropriate literacy, numeracy and monetary skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Overall the quality of teaching is satisfactory. During the inspection, good teaching was seen that moved the pupils' learning along rapidly. Younger students, beginning often from a very low starting point, try hard in lessons and begin to develop confidence reading to others. Teaching is interesting and lessons are well planned and organised. In a good personal, social, health and citizenship (PSHCE) lesson with pupils aged 11 to 12 years, the teacher managed behaviour well and pupils were able to give examples of reasons for bullying with one pupil saying, 'Bullies need help as well as someone who is bullied'. Younger students' learning is satisfactory and they are reducing the

gaps in their learning caused by their special educational needs and the legacy of previous and present poor attendance. The school has initiated a project to support literacy through individual work, which is producing good results in reading and spelling. This could be extended to include a greater focus on writing.

For older students, learning over time is good as the teachers build on the work of the earlier years and students become increasingly motivated by the opportunities of succeeding in examinations and taking academic and vocational subjects and work related experiences. In a good history lesson for pupils aged 14 to 15 years, teaching was engaging with good questions eliciting thoughtful responses, good use of resources including a captivating video and frameworks to support writing.

With older and younger students, teaching assistants make a positive contribution, working closely with teachers, and supporting students sensitively and effectively.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. Since the previous inspection the school week has been extended and the curriculum now meets statutory requirements. There is a wide range of engaging activities that are suitably planned and are appreciated by students. The school appropriately emphasises literacy and PSHCE and the contribution of sports and games is also given high priority. The school, in conjunction with local colleges, offers a wide and increasing range of appropriately accredited courses including vocational courses, entry-level examinations and GCSEs. The curriculum is enriched by residential experiences; the week prior to the inspection had been a residential week, which students said they had greatly enjoyed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support of students are good. In lessons, the system of rewarding effort and achievement works well and teachers are consistent and careful to explain to students the reasons for their grades at the end of each lesson. Students accept this with good grace and learn from these brief discussions. Good support is provided by regular meetings with each student's key worker, in which students can talk about any matter that concerns them. Support for work experience, work related learning and links with local colleges is strong and has led, for example, to all but one of the leavers gaining either employment or a college place. Suitable arrangements for safeguarding students are in place and there are appropriate child protection procedures. Students report that on the very rare occasions when bullying occurs; they feel fully confident to go to staff, who deal with it effectively. Students participate in the school's council and are consulted routinely on whole school matters. The school promotes students' health through for example sports and healthy eating options.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Governors give satisfactory support to the school and are deeply committed to it, but recognise the need to further refine their monitoring of the achievement of students and subject developments. The Headteacher is a strong presence in the school, respected by staff and students alike. She, together with all the staff, sets the good ethos of the school, which supports behaviour so well. The Headteacher and other senior managers have a clear vision for the school's progress. Subject development plans, including cost implications, have been developed but these and other elements of schools' self-evaluation are not pulled together as well as they should be into a formal, coherent school improvement plan that helps determine the priorities, timescales, costs and other aspects of planning. The school effectively promotes equal opportunities for students to succeed and this is reflected in the fact that all but one student in the leavers' group achieved a college place or employment. Parents are involved in the school and very supportive of it and their views are routinely sought and listened to. The school works successfully to develop effective links with others including education, health and social services colleagues. The leadership and management of the school have had a significant impact on removing the school from its former category of 'serious weakness' and are in a satisfactory position to continue the improvement.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Students

I inspected your school on the 19 and 20 June and I am writing to thank you for being so kind and helpful to me and to tell you what I found.

The school has some important strengths. Your behaviour is good and you are courteous and thoughtful and the school supports you well in this. The school provides interesting lessons, a good range of subjects and other activities and gives you the opportunity to take a range of examinations.

There are a couple of things that the school can do even better. Firstly, it could look at how the whole school is doing in a more formal way so that its priorities are made clearer. Secondly the school could improve attendance. So as well as complimenting the staff on the things they do well, I have asked them to work on these improvements. I hope you will want to try and help the school as much as you can to improve attendance, so that you do not miss important work. Thank you again for your help and the very best wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Farrell

Lead Inspector