

# The Phoenix Centre

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	131629
<b>Local authority</b>	Darlington
<b>Inspection number</b>	384854
<b>Inspection dates</b>	1–2 February 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Andrew Johnson HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	21
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The management committee
<b>Chair</b>	Pat Howarth
<b>Headteacher</b>	Kay Kelly
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19–20 January 2010
<b>School address</b>	Eldon Street Darlington DL3 0NS
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## Introduction

Inspection team

Andrew Johnson

Her Majesty's Inspector

The centre was given one day's notice of the inspection. The inspector observed eight lessons taught by six teachers. He spent approximately six hours in lessons. The inspector talked to students and held meetings with the Chair of the Management Committee, a consultant, a representative of the local authority and staff. He looked at the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) however, no responses were present to be viewed. Documents were scrutinised, including the self-evaluation report and development plan. Tracking data, in reference to academic progress, behaviour, attendance and progression were analysed. Examples of students' work were also examined.

## Information about the school

The Phoenix Centre is a small pupil referral unit with places for 30 students. It was inspected in January 2010 and placed in special measures. It provides education for students who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools or who are at risk of exclusion. In the main, their exclusion has been due to poor behaviour and many have been persistently absent. The centre aims to assess the reasons for students' poor behaviour, including identifying any disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and to support them to find appropriate mainstream, special or vocational education. Alternative curricular provision is provided by two partner organisations. A 'high impact team' has recently been established which provides behavioural support for students in mainstream schools.

Most students are boys and nearly all are of White British heritage. One of the current students has a statement of special educational needs and three are in the process of assessment. A high proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. Two students are looked after children.

A restructure of local authority provision took place in July 2011, resulting in the closure of the other pupil referral unit in Darlington. There have been significant changes to staff since the previous inspection and a new headteacher was appointed in May 2011.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate**  
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall Effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>3</b>

## Key Findings

- In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.
- The overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory. Students' behaviour has improved significantly and is satisfactory. Last year almost all Year 11 students successfully moved on to further education, training or employment. The length of time students stay at the centre has been reduced and a higher proportion are reintegrated into mainstream schools.
- The atmosphere in the centre is usually calm. The exclusion rate is much reduced and incidents of extremely poor behaviour are far less frequent. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory but a minority need to develop more acceptable social behaviour. Staff do not always deal with poor behaviour in a consistent way.
- The annual attendance rate has improved by 30% but remains low. A significant minority of students join the centre having refused to attend their previous school. Staff try very hard to help students return to learning and often succeed. Individual student attendance rates improve significantly in comparison to their previous history.
- Students join the centre with very low attainment in English and mathematics. Most make progress in line with expectations and a few do better than that. However, this does not make up for their previous underachievement and they leave with standards below those typical for their age.
- The quality of teaching has improved but remains satisfactory. Students learn best in vocational lessons. Insufficient emphasis is placed upon the development of students' literacy and numeracy. Parents and carers are satisfied with the quality of teaching and often praise the work of the centre.

- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Many improvements have been made as a result of the work of the new headteacher and Chair of the Management Committee. There are much better partnerships with mainstream schools. More work is required to improve the quality of teaching and the way in which the centre measures the quality of its work.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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

- Improve students' literacy and numeracy by:
  - planning lessons more effectively and developing better links between subjects
  - increasing the amount of time students practise their reading and writing
  - ensuring literacy and numeracy is seen as a key aspect of learning by all teachers.
- Improve the evaluation of the work of the centre by:
  - revising the criteria used to judge the impact it has on individual students
  - focusing lesson observations on the quality of learning rather than teacher activity.
- Improve students' social and moral development by:
  - enabling them to recognise that their behaviour must be appropriate to school
  - developing students' understanding of acceptable attitudes in the world of work
  - ensuring staff apply behaviour management techniques consistently
  - improving the specialist support students receive in relation to their social and emotional needs and development.

## **Main Report**

### **Achievement of pupils**

Achievement is satisfactory and improving. The inspector observed students making satisfactory progress in the development of vocational skills, knowledge and understanding. Although progress varies significantly between students, it is rarely inadequate and there are examples of good learning. Examination of students' books and tracking records indicates that the majority of students are making satisfactory progress in academic subjects.

The attainment of students who leave at the end of Year 11 is low in comparison to the national average. For example, no students left with five good grades at GCSE. An increased proportion attained a GCSE pass of any kind compared with at the time of the previous inspection. For most students, this represents the first recognition of any form of academic achievement. The process of assessment of special educational

needs has improved and this means that appropriate provision can be identified more quickly.

Disabled students and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, although managers recognise that the centre can only offer a short term solution for most of these students.

The centre's assessment data show that students join with very low level literacy and numeracy skills. They make satisfactory progress in English and mathematics but this does not enable them to fully make up for their previous underachievement.

Since the previous inspection, the proportion of students who are successfully re-integrated into mainstream schools has increased significantly. So far this year, five students have returned to the mainstream. It is planned that a further six students will make the first steps towards reintegration in the week after the inspection.

Seven of the eight students who left Year 11 last year moved on to employment, education or training. Although about half of the current students have been at the centre for more than a year, the average length of stay has reduced. Most parents and carers recognise that the centre has a positive impact on students' learning and their future.

### **Quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching has improved and is satisfactory. As a result, students develop good skills in construction, practical cooking and sport and a good understanding of health and social care. Teachers devise personalised programmes for students but do not always use them well enough to adapt teaching and learning to meet the needs of individuals. For example, too little attention is paid to students' literacy and numeracy needs. Marking is done frequently but does not always pick up problems with spelling, handwriting or general presentation and students are not given enough advice on how to improve their reading and writing.

Teachers use questioning well to test understanding but sometimes measure progress against the completion of a task rather than the development of learning. Teachers and teaching assistants are very patient. The individual support students receive and the very small class sizes ensure that students are usually kept on task. However, they are not given enough time to work collaboratively and prepare for the demands of mainstream education or enough opportunity to practise their reading and writing. In some lessons, students spend too long simply following instructions rather than developing their understanding.

The curriculum is well focussed on the development vocational skills. Students enjoy trips out and spoke enthusiastically about their trip to a centre for the elderly. The addition of a construction area has added to boys' enjoyment of school. Parents and carers are satisfied with the quality of teaching and how it prepares children for the future. Incidents of poor behaviour are decreasing but continue to disrupt learning, particularly when students are in more academic lessons. Teachers rarely collaborate to develop project work. Too few connections are made between subjects to deepen students' understanding, particularly in relation to basic skills. Information and

communication technology resources have been improved, but the impact of their use varies significantly. Teaching has a satisfactory impact on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Students' behaviour has improved and is now satisfactory. The atmosphere in the centre is much calmer than at the time of the previous inspection. The number of fixed-term exclusions has been greatly reduced. Parents and carers feel that their children are kept safe. Students told inspectors that there were incidents of poor behaviour but they were well handled by staff and they feel safe within the centre.

Most inappropriate behaviour is usually nipped in the bud, however, there are still times when it is allowed to escalate. This often results in students having temper tantrums or swearing at staff. The current behaviour management system places too much emphasis on reacting to the quality of behaviour rather than developing social, moral and spiritual awareness. For example, too little work is done to enable students to recognise the likely impact of a disrespectful attitude at work, college or back in mainstream school. Bullying is rare and, when it does happen, it is dealt with effectively.

Case studies provided by the centre show extremely poor behaviour is often a result of difficulties students experience at home or in the wider community. Despite its best efforts to develop partnerships with other agencies and facilitate specialist support, the root causes of this extreme behaviour sometimes go unaddressed. The Phoenix Centre is left to pick up the pieces.

Attendance has improved but remains low. Most students improve their attendance in comparison to their history in previous schools. A clear new attendance policy and straightforward guide for parents and carers has been put in place but there are still too many students who are persistently absent. Staff work effectively on this problem and the number of persistent absentees is reducing.

### **Leadership and management**

Leadership and management are satisfactory and have brought about much-needed improvement. Managers have successfully addressed all the inadequate areas identified at the previous inspection. They have replaced the perception of the centre as a 'sin bin' with one of a 'stepping stone'. The crux of this new approach is that the centre is seen as providing a short-term solution for most students.

Effective partnerships have been established with local schools and alternative providers. The management committee provides much better support to the headteacher. The curriculum is much improved and is now meeting students' needs. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to promote equality, tackle discrimination and make arrangements for safeguarding. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.

Despite the many challenges faced by staff, morale remains high. Levels of staff absence have been reduced. Performance management has improved, although too little is done to ensure staff take a consistent approach to behaviour management.

The newly-defined objectives of the centre have been linked to a set of performance indicators and a development plan. The use of data to identify those who are at risk of underachieving has improved but some targets for individual students lack sufficient precision and challenge. There are areas for improvement in the way in which the work of the centre is evaluated. For example, too much emphasis is placed upon comparing its performance with mainstream schools rather than outcomes for individual students. When observing lessons, managers spend too much time recording teaching methods, rather than assessing the quality of students' learning. Despite these remaining weaknesses, the centre is moving forward at a good pace and demonstrates a good capacity to improve.

## **Glossary**



## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

## Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

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## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



26 January 2012

Dear Students

### **Inspection of Phoenix Centre, Darlington, DL3 0NS**

Thank you for welcoming me to the centre. Particular thanks to the students I talked with and for making the chocolate cake, it was delicious! I am writing to let you know what I thought about the Phoenix Centre. I think it has improved a lot and is providing you with a satisfactory quality of education. Many of you have had bad experiences in mainstream education, but the centre is helping you turn things around. Since the last inspection, behaviour and attendance have improved a lot.

Your teachers and the other staff are very patient and work hard to keep you on track. From low starting points, you make better progress in learning, particularly in subjects such as construction, catering, sport and health and social care. This means many of you successfully move onto college, training or back to school.

The centre is always trying to improve and I have tried to help by identifying some things I think they could do better. They are to:

- improve your reading, writing and mathematics by building this into the subjects you enjoy
- improve your understanding of how your attitudes effect other people
- improve the way in which the quality of the centre is measured.

The Phoenix Centre provides you with a fresh start and I hope you take that opportunity. If you continue to work hard and enjoy learning, I am sure you will go from strength to strength.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Johnson  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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