

Phoenix U16

Unit E, Metro Business Park, Clough Street, Hanley, ST1 4AF

Inspection dates	20–21 March 2013	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This school is good because

- Students make good progress from very low starting points. The headteacher and staff help students to develop positive attitudes to learning and, as a result, all students leave school with five good GCSEs, excluding English and mathematics.
- There is a good range of subjects on offer that interest students and prepare them well for the world of work. Their confidence and belief that they can succeed improves rapidly.
- Teaching is good. Teachers make sure that the work set is interesting and at the right level for each student.
- Students' behaviour is good. Teachers expect that students will learn to control their behaviour. All students know and accept that to be able to attend school they must sign up to and follow a clear code of conduct.
- Students feel safe. They are cared for well because of effective arrangements for their welfare, health and safety.
- The headteacher has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. She has the expectation that students can achieve well regardless of their difficulties, and that teaching should be the very best it can be.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Opportunities for students to gain first-hand experience of the world of work, although adequate, are limited.
- There is not enough consistently good or outstanding teaching to encourage exceptional progress or to make sure students reach the highest levels in English.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- The inspector observed six lessons taught by four teachers, looked at students' work and held meetings with the headteacher and a group of students.
- The school's documentation was examined, including staff training records, schemes of work, teachers' planning, records of students' learning and progress. The inspector checked the school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools.
- The inspector spoke to students and took account of the school's own student survey. The views of the staff were considered through the scrutiny of three questionnaires. There were no responses on Parent View.

Inspection team

Jacqueline Wordsworth, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a small independent school registered to provide education for up to 25 students aged between 14 and 16 years. The school occupies the ground floor of an industrial unit in the Hanley area of Stoke-on-Trent.
- Currently, there are 19 students on roll, 16 boys and three girls. Some of whom have been excluded from mainstream schools because of their behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. No student has a statement of special educational needs.
- Some students are dually registered with their mainstream schools and attend this school on a part-time basis.
- All of the students' places are funded by Stoke-on-Trent local authority. Almost all students are White British. No students are looked after by the local authority, or speak English as an additional language.
- Phoenix U16 is owned and managed by a sole proprietor, who is also the headteacher.
- The school does not make any alternative provision for students.
- This is the school's first full inspection since its registration and opening in February 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is all good or outstanding by increasing the training that staff receive, so that all staff in all subjects can deliver high quality learning in English and make the best use of lesson time.
- Increase the opportunities for work-related opportunities for students in local businesses or organisations.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

Students' achievement is good because of effective teaching and good attention paid to developing their confidence in their ability to succeed. Many students are well behind other young people of a similar age when they enter the school in Key Stage 4, as all of the students have been out of school for some considerable time before starting at Phoenix. Working in short bursts on short focused topics and units of work helps students to complete tasks and begin to take pride in what they accomplish, often making up for the extensive gaps in their learning.

Students make good progress, with all making two levels and for some three levels of progress in six months. All gain five good GCSEs, with overall A* to C grades, in a number of subjects, which compares favourably with all schools nationally. However, the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including mathematics and English, although increasing, is well below that found in other schools nationally. All students do well in the BTEC science and sport courses, with many students gaining a merit.

Improving students' literacy and numeracy skills is a high priority for the school. Work in students' English books shows good progress in a short space of time. Some of the diary extracts written by the students show a good understanding of how to convey the horror and emotion of war, through their choice of language and sentence structure. A small number of students have exceptionally low levels of literacy when they enter the school, which hampers their ability to learn and make progress in other subjects. Their knowledge of spelling and grammar, although increasing, is not secure enough to reach the highest GCSE grades because opportunities are missed in a few lessons to practise these skills. Teachers make sure that students' reading skills improve so that students can make progress and catch-up on their learning during their time in school. There is no difference in the achievement of boys and girls.

Students are developing an understanding of how to apply their number skills and knowledge in unfamiliar situations and real-life contexts. This is because teachers give students good opportunities to work on problems that occur in everyday life or in the world of work. Where students show any sign of falling behind or missing their half-termly target, effective action is taken through one-to-one tuition and mentoring to enable them to catch-up quickly.

A particular strength of the school is the number of students who improve their chances of getting a job or place at college when they leave school by completing an accredited preparation for working life course. However, the course does not include a work placement. All students who left in 2012 went on either to college or employment, with one student joining the armed forces.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Good

Behaviour is generally good and managed well by staff. As a result, there is a calm atmosphere around the school. The behaviour log indicates that when incidents occur they usually only require minimum intervention by staff. Most students have a keen sense of right and wrong, and generally treat each other with respect. Some exhibit challenging behaviour on entry to the school but over time this improves substantially, as does their trust in adults, in response to consistently used methods to manage behaviour.

The school is particularly successful in re-engaging students in their learning. This is clearly demonstrated in their regular attendance. Most students have come from situations of poor or non-existent attendance. Records indicate that attendance for virtually all students improves significantly during their time at the school. Students are encouraged to take responsibility and

develop their leadership skills. Students in Year 11 often help teach those in Year 10 on the craft skills course. This helps them to gain in confidence and builds a belief that they can achieve.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students show increasingly positive attitudes and increasing perseverance and resilience when learning. Regular visits to places of interest and participation in a well-planned citizenship course help students to develop a good understanding of British national institutions and public bodies. Students are increasingly able to discuss sensitive issues such as racial discrimination as seen in an English lesson on the book *Of Mice and Men* and the speeches of Martin Luther King where students explored the 'American Dream'. Students were also able to link this to other forms of discrimination that people may experience, as they were able to draw on knowledge gained from their personal, social, health and citizenship lessons. They have less understanding of how others live because there are few opportunities for students to visit places of worship or to be taught explicitly about other faiths; although aspects of diversity and difference are taught in the citizenship lessons.

Quality of teaching

Good

Teaching and assessment are good and support students' good learning and progress over time. All staff know the students very well and there are comprehensive arrangements in place for the induction of new students. Teachers manage students' behaviour well through consistently high expectations within a sensitive, professional relationship with students. This helps learning to proceed in a relaxed and supportive manner. Teachers' plans for lessons take good account of what students will learn by the end of the session and how they will work through a series of activities.

Teachers make effective use of the processes to check on what students know and can do and how much progress they are making. They use questions well to check that students have understood the task set or whether they can move on more quickly to work that is more difficult. This regular checking of learning allows staff to identify quickly those students who are at risk of falling behind and trigger good quality extra support. This may include extra learning sessions or meetings with learning mentors. Students with particular emotional needs are supported well so that they can achieve as well as their classmates.

Students often work together in pairs and small groups. They are increasingly able to take turns in discussions, respond to more complex questions, and respect others' viewpoints and work. In the few less effective lessons, teachers spend too much time talking, which reduces the amount of time for students to complete tasks on their own and develop perseverance. A check on students' books and work folders across a range of subjects shows that marking is regular but very occasionally it does always not help to move all students to the next level.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The curriculum is good, providing students with a good range of subjects and opportunities to gain nationally accredited qualifications. Subject policies are in place, which make clear the most important things that the students need to learn. English, mathematics and science have priority on the timetable and there are good opportunities for students to engage in three hours of physical activity each week. This works well in encouraging students' attendance and increased participation in learning. All students have access to a detailed well-planned programme of personal, social, health, citizenship and physical education. They all achieve GCSE or BTEC qualifications.

Students receive good advice and support for their future through careers guidance provided by the Connexions service, which helps students to secure places at college or employment when they

leave. There is an appropriate range of vocational courses, which students can follow. However, some aspects of work-related learning, although increasing, are not as well developed due to a lack of suitable teaching spaces and limited offers of placements by local businesses.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

The welfare, health and safety of the students are good and all the independent school standards are met. The school fully complies with the regulations in respect of the checks it makes on prospective employees with regard to their identity and suitability to work with young people. Procedures to ensure students' safety, including risk assessments, are comprehensive and followed well so that students are kept safe. Regular fire drills take place, as do the checks on the electrical and fire safety equipment.

All staff, including the teachers in charge of child protection, first aid and safeguarding, receive timely and accredited training. Staff do not shy away from confronting difficult and sensitive issues. For example, there are effective procedures to ensure that students are protected from sexual exploitation and taught about the risks associated with alcohol and drug abuse. Students report that they value being taught about how to deal with the anti-social behaviour, gang culture, knife and gun crime that exists in some of their local neighbourhoods.

Students have a good understanding of the different types of bullying and know how to keep themselves safe on the internet and social networking sites. Those students facing challenges in their lives are supported well by the headteacher and other staff, who provide them with opportunities to talk about their concerns and develop ways to cope with their difficulties. The headteacher and students themselves can point to examples of students whose behaviour has improved dramatically because of such support. Students state that there is no bullying in the school because staff are vigilant and that there are good systems in place to prevent it from happening.

Leadership and management

Good

The headteacher shows drive and ambition to build on the school's early success and to raise students' attainment. She has a good understanding of the school and, as a result, the school is able to improve. She has made sure that all of the independent school regulations are met. The headteacher checks on the quality of teachers' work and pupils' progress frequently through visits to classrooms and regular meetings. These checks place a good emphasis on the impact that teaching has on students' learning and progress. Follow-up visits are planned to check that areas for development for individual staff have been improved. Not all staff receive training to help them gain the skills to make sure that students can attain the highest grades in English and mathematics.

All of the required information for parents and carers is provided or made available to parents and carers. The school website has important and useful information to support parents and carers, particularly in relation to what the school has to offer students, and the importance of making sure all students are protected and safe. The procedure for handling complaints fully meets requirements. All of the responses to the staff questionnaires, the school's own survey of student, parent and carer views are positive and appreciative of what the school has to offer its young people.

The school building is well maintained, tidy and has a good range of resources, including good access to information and communication technology. The school is aware that, although adequate, the outdoor space is not an inviting space for students to spend time.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	137892
Inspection number	408678
DfE registration number	861/6007

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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	Secondary
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	19
Number of part time pupils	12
Proprietor	Shelley Jamieson
Chair	None
Headteacher	Shelley Jamieson
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Annual fees (day pupils)	£12,730
Telephone number	01782 922306
Fax number	None
Email address	admin@phoenixlearning.co.uk

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