

The Phoenix School

Manor Road, Dawley, Telford, TF4 3DZ

Inspection dates 19–20 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' achievement requires improvement. The progress made by some students is not rapid enough, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Teaching requires improvement because not enough is good or better to secure good learning and progress.
- Teachers do not always set work that is appropriately demanding for more-able students or promote students' independent learning skills in lessons.
- Governors have not been effective in holding the school to account for the quality of teaching and the progress that students make.
- The school has rigorous systems for promoting good behaviour and making sure that students feel safe. However, not all students are motivated learners and some do not come to school as often as they should. This limits their progress.
- The quality of teaching is not strong enough in mathematics to ensure that all pupils reach their potential. Students have too few opportunities to solve problems involving real-life, everyday examples of mathematics.
- Leadership and management require improvement because, over time, not enough focus has been placed on setting challenging targets for students and the new leadership team has not been in post long enough to have a proven track record.

The school has the following strengths

- The new senior leadership team has been quick to identify the right areas for improvement. Senior leaders are taking action that is already having a positive impact on students' learning.
- All students are equally valued and included in what the school has to offer. There is a clear determination that outcomes will improve because all students deserve the best possible education and chances in life.
- The school's capacity to improve is enhanced by the commitment and professionalism of the staff. They are eager and willing to improve their practice through relevant training and in response to the advice of senior leaders.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 35 lessons. Four lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders. Inspectors also looked at students' work with the headteacher to assess their progress. During lessons, inspectors looked at books, listened to students read and talked to them about their work.
- Year 10 students were not in school during the inspection because they were on work experience.
- Inspectors spoke to four governors, two representatives from the local authority, senior leaders, staff and students.
- Inspectors looked at assessment information, attendance data, the school's improvement plan, the school's self-evaluation, a wide range of policies, and governing body documentation.
- Inspectors took account of the 23 responses to the online parent questionnaire (Parent View). They also received one written communication from a parent. Inspectors also considered 46 questionnaires about the school completed by members of staff.

Inspection team

Steven Cartlidge, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Rosemary Barnfield	Additional Inspector
Kerin Jones	Additional Inspector
Neil Gillespie	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average secondary school.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of students entitled to the pupil premium (additional government funding to support students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority) is higher than average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is high and the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs, or who are receiving support through school action plus, is above average.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' progress and attainment.
- The school uses a 'travel to learn' programme offering alternative provision for some Year 10 and 11 students at Shropshire Council County Training, NOVA, Walford College, North Shropshire College, TCAT and New College.
- The present leadership team has been in post since September 2012.
- The school is currently preparing to move into a new building in September 2013 and is in the process of converting to an academy from June 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is always good or better, and accelerate students' rates of progress so that they rapidly close the gap with national averages, by:
 - eliminating inadequate teaching by sharing the good and outstanding practice that is already in the school
 - making sure that all groups of students, particularly the more able, are consistently set work that is appropriately demanding and leads to them all being fully engaged in lessons
 - giving students of all abilities the skills and opportunity to work independently, express their own ideas and discover solutions for themselves
 - improving the effectiveness of teachers' marking, so that it helps students make more progress and improve their work, and allowing time for students to reflect upon the advice written in their books and then act upon this guidance
 - in mathematics lessons, making sure that students have more opportunities to solve problems that can be applied to real-life everyday situations.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management by:
 - raising the targets set for all students
 - taking urgent action to improve attendance rates, particularly among those students who are identified as persistently absent and who are known to be eligible for free school meals, so their attendance is at least in line with national averages by September 2013
 - ensuring that the impact of planned actions can be measured so that progress in making improvements can be checked throughout the year
 - making sure that governors use clear measures of performance to challenge leaders with increasing rigour, particularly with regard to setting targets and students' progress.

- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement. From standards that are significantly below average on entry to the school, students' overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 remains significantly below the national average.
- The school used early entry to GCSE examinations in mathematics in the past in order for the students to gain their best possible grade. Despite this, the proportion achieving grade C or above in 2012 was well below the national average. Measures have been put in place to improve this, and the school predicts that these will have a positive impact on the grades for 2013.
- In lessons where students' progress requires improvement, it is often because teachers' expectations of how much students can do in the lesson is too low, resulting in challenge that is not high enough, particularly for the more able.
- The school continues to receive Year 7 pupils who have below-average attainment, with many eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium. School leaders, in recognition of this situation, have introduced a new tracking system that accurately checks students' progress. This is already providing evidence of improvement in these pupils' progress.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs made similar progress to other groups in the school in 2012, although those students supported at school action and those with a statement achieved marginally better. This was the result of some individual needs being identified early and the necessary support provided to meet them. Clear tracking and the positive effect of support programmes suggest that disabled students and those who have special educational needs are on course to perform considerably better this year.
- The difference in progress and standards in English and mathematics between students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and their classmates is less than that found nationally. Students known to be eligible for free school meals in 2012 were on average three quarters of a grade behind the rest of the students. In recognition of this, the school has introduced extra help for these students and pupil premium funding is being spent well on additional tuition, revision sessions and literacy support. This is ensuring that these students are now starting to make better progress. In 2012, the small number of students who are looked after by the local authority performed better than others in their class, on average by one grade.
- There is a clear commitment to developing students' literacy skills. For example, during the daily 'learning for life' period, many students are encouraged to read a book of their own choice. A high proportion of students join the school with reading ages that are well below their actual age and this reduces their enjoyment or willingness to read. It is still too early to see the full impact of the range of initiatives being used by the school for improving literacy standards. Nevertheless, school data show that many students are making faster progress.
- Since September 2012, in all year groups, there is evidence that many students, including those with a statement of special educational needs, students supported at school action plus and those eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium are making rapid progress particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching is too inconsistent across the school. Not enough teaching is of good or better quality to ensure that students make consistently good progress in their learning, either in individual lessons or over time.
- In lessons that require improvement, teachers do not always set work that is hard enough or which builds on students' previous learning and experience, especially for more-able students. For instance, in some mathematics lessons, students have too few opportunities to solve problems where they can relate to real-life everyday situations in order to help their understanding. The teachers talk for too long at the start of the lesson, giving students little opportunity to contribute. Few opportunities are given for students to take charge of their own learning and so they become too reliant on the teacher.
- Leaders have recently introduced a 'feedback for progress' stamp to be used in students' books. This helps students to understand what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. Its use is, at the moment, variable. Where it is being used well, students have a clear understanding of how well they are doing. In lessons where books are marked infrequently, pupils do not have a clear idea of what they can and cannot do. Plus, in too many lessons, time is not given for pupils to respond and take any action on comments made by their teachers.
- There is some excellent support provided by teaching assistants, particularly for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Where this occurs, students make excellent progress. This is not the case across the whole school, and some teaching assistants are given insufficient direction from the class teacher.
- In the lessons with good or outstanding teaching, students respond eagerly to enthusiastic teachers who have a good understanding of the subject. In these lessons, teachers match work accurately to the ability levels of all students. They know when to let students work by themselves and when to teach the whole class.
- In the best lessons, teachers ask searching questions that probe students' understanding and encourage them to check their own and each other's work. In an outstanding drama lesson, the teacher continually checked students' understanding throughout the lesson and very clearly explained how they could improve their work. The teacher used praise exceptionally well to encourage students to do even better.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- Although most students behave well in lessons, not all are motivated to do well, particularly where teaching requires improvement or is inadequate. In these lessons, misbehaviour occurs at times because the teacher has not planned the lesson well enough and has given students work that is too easy or too difficult.
- The three-year trend for attendance shows some improvement but attendance is still below the national average. The school is working hard to improve this situation and has introduced a new set of measures to focus on the importance of attending school every day. Leaders are aware, however, that more work is needed to encourage regular attendance, support families who struggle to get their children to school, and to make clear the effect that absence has on their children's progress and attainment.

- Students conduct themselves well. They are polite and courteous to visitors. They willingly talk to adults and are honest about their feelings about the school. The school promotes positive relationships between students and they get on well together.
- Students say they feel safe and they demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. For example, they have a very good knowledge of issues around internet safety and of different forms of bullying. The school works hard to improve behaviour and there are clear procedures to support students who have difficulties in these areas.
- The proportion of students out of school on fixed-term exclusions has fallen since the last academic year when it was well above the national average. The reduction is due to the introduction of a new policy that gives greater clarity to students about what the school considers unacceptable behaviour. As a result, behaviour has improved and students now say they are clear about what is and is not acceptable. The school has permanently excluded an extremely small number of students.
- Responses from parents who completed the online survey indicate a large majority feel that the school deals effectively with bullying. There was a similar response from a parent survey carried out by the school last year.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because the actions taken by the new leadership team have not yet had enough impact on raising standards over a sustained period of time. Several senior leaders are only recently in post. Some subject leaders are relatively new to their roles and responsibilities but are developing well with the advice and support of senior leaders.
- Results have fluctuated since the last inspection, with one year improving and then declining back to their previous levels. The reasons for this have been thoroughly investigated by the headteacher. There are now more checks on how well lessons are being taught and where weaker teaching remains, senior leaders are aware of this and are providing appropriate support and training. Senior leaders were accurate in their judgement of lessons when joint observations were undertaken with inspectors.
- The leadership team has drawn up plans to improve the quality of teaching and to make sure that all the students make good progress. Not all of the school's plans for improvement incorporate measurable success criteria. This limits the scope for leaders and governors to closely monitor the impact of improvements. Nevertheless, there are early signs that students' rates of progress are beginning to improve. This is evident not just from the school's data on students' progress but also from the work in students' books.
- The headteacher has considerably strengthened the way in which teachers are appraised for their performance and does not allow staff to be rewarded by increased salaries unless they are successful in helping students to make at least good progress.
- School leaders ensure that different groups of pupils have an equal chance to succeed and they tackle any instances of discrimination.
- The range of subjects and topics taught has been designed carefully around students' interests and meets their needs to prepare them well for the next stage of their education, training or

employment. The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. For example, it provides leadership opportunities for students who take part in The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, encourages Year 11 to become prefects and Years 7, 8 and 9 to become 'lead learners' and to help other students.

- The local authority is fully aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has worked well with senior leaders to ensure that the school continues with the rapid improvement that is now taking place before it becomes an academy.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Previously governors have not done enough to hold the school to account for the quality of teaching and the progress that students make. They have not been rigorous enough in setting demanding targets for the school and for students' progress. However, the governing body now has a better understanding of the school's strengths and areas needing improvement, including the need for the school to improve its GCSE examination results this summer. Following their recent training, governors now question and challenge the headteacher and have begun to set more demanding targets for the future performance of the school.
 - Governors have been kept fully aware of the developments of the new academy and understand their changing roles and responsibilities that will take place in the summer.
 - Governors have a good understanding of the school's pay and performance of teachers and the school's budget is kept under tight review, with spending of the pupil premium being monitored carefully.
 - The governing body ensures that safeguarding policies and procedures meet all requirements.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	123576
Local authority	Telford and Wrekin
Inspection number	402179

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	653
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Clark
Headteacher	Neil Stonehouse
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2010
Telephone number	01952 386700
Fax number	01952 386741
Email address	phoenix.school@taw.org.uk

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