

# Phoenix School

49 Bow Road, London, E3 2AD

**Inspection dates** 11–12 December 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school.

- The school meets fully its key aim of providing a life enhancing education and developing each individual's potential, working towards a fulfilling adult life.
- Pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points to the end of Key Stage 4, particularly in literacy and numeracy, as well as in other National Curriculum subjects.
- A significant strength is the rapid progress pupils make in their communication skills. The school's cutting edge work in this respect was highly commended in its recent autism re-accreditation.
- Children attending the Early Years Foundation Stage make excellent progress. This prepares them exceptionally well for learning and enables them to move on successfully to the next stage of their education.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students now continue their seamless progression through the school and are thoroughly prepared for the next stage of their education at further education colleges or other training opportunities.
- Teaching is outstanding. All adults working in lessons work consistently well together to support learning and improve pupils' communication skills.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding. This is because of highly motivating lessons and the superb quality support pupils receive from all adults in the room.
- The highly impressive expressive arts programme throughout the school adds significantly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Older pupils told inspectors they feel safe at the school in all the activities they take part in and that they enjoy lessons.
- The headteacher, ably supported by his senior leaders, has made sure there has been a continuous and highly effective focus on maintaining and improving further all aspects of the school's work.
- The experienced Chair of the Governing Body and her governors know the school very well and are highly effective in their duties.
- The high quality support offered by the Phoenix Outreach Service helps mainstream school staff develop their confidence and expertise in supporting their own pupils with autistic spectrum disorders.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 13 lessons taught by 13 different teachers. Ten of the lessons were observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with a group of Year 11 pupils and a group of Year 13 students. Meetings were also held with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, others with posts of responsibility, the Chair of the Governing Body and governors with responsibility for safeguarding and health and safety. In addition, the lead inspector also met with the head of Phoenix Outreach Service and with a representative of the local authority.
- The lead inspector took account of 32 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and 64 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspectors observed the school's practice and looked at a range of documentation, including its checks on how well it is doing and improvement planning, information on pupils' progress, documents used by senior leaders to check the school's work, governors' documentation, as well as records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.

## Inspection team

James Bowden, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jackie Blount

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Phoenix School provides for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). The majority also have severe learning difficulties and speech, language and communication difficulties.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has opened a sixth form section, which is now in its fourth year. It has been housed in new accommodation on the same site, which was completed in August this year as part of the Building Schools for the Future project.
- Currently, the large majority of pupils are boys. The majority are of Bangladeshi or Somali background, a small minority are from Black backgrounds and a few are from White backgrounds. A large majority are from homes where English is not the home language. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs for autistic spectrum disorders.
- The proportion of pupils at the school eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional government funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children in local authority care and children from service families, is well above the national average. Currently, there are very few in local authority care.
- Pupils new to the school are usually admitted in September, but there are also admissions throughout the year.
- The school uses Tower Hamlets College and the Mudchute Farm for one morning per week for Key Stage 4 pupils. One sixth form class spends a day each week at the nearby mainstream Wessex Sixth Form Centre.
- The Phoenix Outreach Service consists of five specialist advisory teachers who support ASD pupils in mainstream schools across Tower Hamlets

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

- Increase the use and range of new technologies in the classroom to make learning even more exciting and develop all pupils' independent communication skills.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1 is low as a result of children's complex needs. Attainment remains well below average in all year groups across the school. However, in relation to their starting points, pupils, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who start at different times during the year, make outstanding progress and achieve particularly well, whatever their abilities, in the main school and sixth form.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, staff check carefully the needs and difficulties of children when they arrive. Individual targets are then set for learning and development, and the outstanding progress they make prepares them well for moving on to Year 1.
- At the end of Year 11, all pupils now stay at the school to join the sixth form. All from the first two groups to have completed their education at Phoenix moved on to further education or training. All have maintained their placements.
- High quality support for all pupils means there are no significant differences in the rates of progress made by those with different levels of learning difficulties, different ethnic groups, boys and girls, those who speak English as an additional language or those supported by pupil premium funding. Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and the very few looked after by local authorities achieve as well as others. Extra support and resources help these pupils make outstanding progress.
- Rapid progress is made in communication skills as a result of the consistent use throughout the school of visual communication symbol cards. A minority now uses these independently and a small minority no longer needs to use them. Consequently, older pupils make great strides in reading, writing and communication skills and in the use of mathematical concepts. A few older pupils know how to break down words into sounds to help them read successfully. In addition, pupils make outstanding progress in all other National Curriculum subjects.
- In all lessons, progress is consistently good, and frequently outstanding. This confirms the school's judgement, which is based on detailed and highly effective checking on how well pupils are doing. In a Key Stage 3 food technology lesson, all adults used visual communication symbol cards highly effectively to help pupils recognise the importance of hygiene in food preparation and to choose their pizza topping ingredients.
- The use of alternative provision supports very effectively pupils' academic and personal development.

### The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching throughout the school promotes excellent learning for all pupils and prepares them well for the next stage of their education. There are two key reasons for this: firstly, the highly effective way all adults in lessons work consistently well to support pupils' learning and manage their behaviour; and, secondly, the consistency of support given to pupils to improve and develop their communication skills.
- In a Key Stage 2 numeracy lesson, all adults knew exactly how to diffuse situations when behaviour could have been disruptive. As a result, pupils also learned about the consequences of any misbehaviour as well as making excellent progress in basic counting and subtraction. In a sixth form lesson, potatoes were sliced, whisks chosen and mashed potato was successfully made and tasted by all. In an Early Years Foundation Stage lesson, there was a high level of enjoyment and new routines learned as children listened to a variety of styles of music on flute and piano. This successfully promoted their creative development.
- In all lessons seen, adults allow pupils enough time to respond to questions and tasks; this makes sure pupils are learning particularly well and developing their independence.
- In all lessons and other formal activities, the appropriate and consistent use of visual communication symbol cards supports learning particularly well and is effective in supporting

pupils' all-round excellent progress. Where appropriate, pupils' speaking, listening skills and writing skills are also supported very well.

- There are also ample opportunities for the more able pupils to develop their independence. In a Key Stage 4 science lesson, pupils worked individually at an experiment using lumps of jelly whilst learning about friction. In a sixth form lesson, each student worked at the individual targets they had agreed with the teacher as part of their developing independence work.
- Teachers use interactive displays and instant visual feedback highly effectively to support learning. However, the school recognises that pupils' independent communication skills could be improved further through an increased use of a wider range new technologies in the classroom. This, in turn, would make learning even more interesting.
- Parents and carers are pleased with the progress their children are making in lessons, as are the pupils who spoke with the inspectors.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are outstanding

- Behaviour is outstanding, in lessons and around the school, because it is a friendly community with consistent routines. Highly effective relationships, between all adults and pupils, result in enjoyable, purposeful and safe learning throughout the whole school day. This includes the twice-weekly extra activities sessions in which all eagerly take part. Underpinning this is the staff's respect for pupils' dignity, well-being and their developing independence.
- Typically, behaviour over time has been outstanding. Since the last inspection, there have been no recorded instances of racism, homophobia or sexual harassment and there have been no instances of bullying. Instances of unacceptable behaviour are rare. There have been no permanent exclusions and instances where pupils are not allowed to go to school for a short time because of poor behaviour have fallen since the previous inspection.
- A resounding 'No!' was the response from older pupils when asked if there was any bullying. One pupil added, 'Friendship is more important.' Pupils know about the importance of e-safety.
- In all lessons observed during the inspection, there was not one instance where learning was disrupted by poor behaviour. Pupils respond really well to the sensitive and calm approach from all adults, which meant they remained on task throughout lessons and made excellent progress in their learning.
- Unauthorised or persistent absences are very rare. Pupils arrive happily in the morning, remain happy throughout the day and leave happy and contented at the end of the day. The annual festive lunch was thoroughly enjoyed by all, especially as teachers took pupils' requests for lunch (using visual communication symbol cards when appropriate) and then 'waited' at pupils' tables!
- Without exception, parents and carers who responded to Parent View are happy with the school's care for their children. This was also confirmed by the responses to the staff questionnaire and by the pupils who met with the inspectors.

### **The leadership and management** are outstanding

- Leadership and management are outstanding because of the headteacher's passionate drive and determined ambition to provide the best education possible for all pupils. Supported by his senior leaders, this has led to continuing and sustained improvement since the previous inspection. All staff are overwhelmingly committed to the school's unbending focus on the quality of its provision and pupil progress. The Early Years Foundation Stage, sixth form and the Phoenix Outreach Service are exceptionally well led.
- Senior leaders regularly check the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress. They set clear targets for teachers to improve further the quality of their work. At the end of each year, recommendations are then made regarding additional responsibilities and training opportunities.
- As a result of the school's uncompromising commitment to equality, all pupils, regardless of circumstances or needs, make outstanding progress in relation to their starting points in their

learning and personal development.

- The subjects and topics pupils study are the same as those in mainstream schools and are tailored to match fully the abilities and individual needs of all pupils. As a result, all have equal opportunity to succeed. The strong focus on preparing pupils for the next stage of their education through developing independence contributes significantly to their strong all-round personal development. The expressive arts programme across the school, together with an impressive range of other extra activities, makes learning even more interesting. As a result, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.
- The school works highly effectively with other professionals, as well as with its own team of therapists, to support pupils' wide-ranging learning needs. The work of the Phoenix Outreach Service is highly regarded in mainstream schools. It also provides specific courses for teachers and other support staff, as well as for parents and carers. This they appreciate, as is evident in their positive responses to Parent View.
- Since the last inspection, the local authority has provided light touch support to this outstanding school. However, support increased appropriately throughout the recent new building programme.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The highly experienced Chair and her governing body work closely with the headteacher to secure continuing improvements. They are prepared to challenge senior leaders, if necessary. Governors undertake specific training to support them in their roles. They recognise the importance of high quality teaching and how this supports outstanding achievements. After checking the work of the headteacher and other staff, governors then make decisions about how well they are working and any action that needs to be taken, as well as training opportunities and pay. They are vigilant about maintaining stringent safeguarding practices to make sure the school and off-site provisions are safe places in which to work and learn. The finance and personnel committee is particularly diligent in making sure that the school's finances are balanced, and in overseeing the use and impact of the pupil premium funding. Current funding is being used to provide extra support to ensure that all pupils, regardless of their circumstances, make the best possible progress in communication skills in order to support their achievements in all subjects. The funding for the support of primary physical education and school sport has not yet been received by the school. There are plans in place as to how this will be used.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	100987
<b>Local authority</b>	Tower Hamlets
<b>Inspection number</b>	425586

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	162
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	30
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Nicky Schroeder
<b>Headteacher</b>	Stewart Harris
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6–7 October 2008
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8980 4740
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