

The Phoenix Special School

Braithwaite Avenue, Keighley, West Yorkshire, BD22 6HZ

Inspection dates 22–23 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- Too few pupils make good progress.
- Teaching is not yet consistently good or better.
- Tasks are not always set at the right level to challenge all pupils to move on at a quick enough pace, particularly for the most able.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils, particularly the most able to practise their numeracy or writing skills.
- Teaching assistants are not always fully effective in lessons.
- Where teaching is not sufficiently challenging or exciting, pupils' behaviour deteriorates.
- Pupils' exposure to signs and symbols limits their understanding and communication skills.
- Subject leaders do not have the skills necessary to check the quality of teaching and learning in their subject to ensure that progress is good or better.

The school has the following strengths

- In the short time that she has been in post, the headteacher has been effective in raising staff morale and in initiating actions that are helping to improve pupils' achievement and the school overall.
- Children get off to a good start in Early Years Foundation Stage and make good progress.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, and ensures they feel and are safe.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 11 lessons, including whole lessons and parts of lessons. One lesson observation was carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspectors listened to pupils reading in lessons and looked at their work.
- Inspectors looked at a range of other evidence, including displays, the school's website and evidence representing the school's wider achievements beyond the classroom.
- They also looked at documentation about pupils' progress, teaching and planning. The school's documents on safeguarding were scrutinised together with records of attendance and pupils' behaviour.
- The inspectors met with a group of pupils and spoke to many pupils individually.
- Inspectors took account of the 11 responses to the online survey of parents' opinions (Parent View). They also looked at the school's own surveys.
- Meetings were held with various members of staff and representatives from the governing body and the local authority.

Inspection team

Angela Shaw, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jim Bennetts

Additional Inspector

Information about this school

- Phoenix is a primary special school for pupils with a wide range of severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- All pupils are supported by a statement of special educational needs.
- The school shares the same site as Merlin Top Academy. Prior to March 2013, both schools were federated.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium is high. The pupil premium is additional government funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children looked after by the local authority.
- The number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is high, as is the number of pupils whose first language is not English.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or better, so that all groups of pupils make better progress in reading, writing and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations and use assessment information in order to set tasks and activities that help pupils, particularly the most able, to make the best possible progress
 - deploying teaching assistants more effectively in lessons, including to support the most able pupils
 - increasing the regular use of signing and other symbols by teachers and teaching assistants to enhance pupils' understanding and communication skills.
- Strengthen leadership and management, by:
 - ensuring that all subject leaders become experienced in monitoring their subjects so that they can provide helpful feedback to colleagues, especially about pupils' learning and progress
 - using the available national information to set ambitious, realistic targets for all pupils based on their starting points
 - ensuring that all leaders and managers use performance information to make certain that all pupils, especially the most able, are achieving well.

Full report

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because too few pupils make rapid enough progress over time from their starting points.
- Systems are now in place to check that assessment is accurate and to demonstrate pupils' progress clearly, using detailed assessment logs. This is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' achievement. However, until recently, pupils' work was sometimes assessed too generously and information had not always been analysed accurately. This makes it more difficult to draw accurate conclusions about the progress pupils make over time.
- Teaching is not consistently good enough so pupils do not achieve sufficiently well.
- Too often, the pace of learning slows because teachers set work with insufficient challenge to enable pupils to make the best possible progress.
- The school's records and observations during the inspection show that there is little difference between the achievement of most groups in the school, including pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, and those supported by pupil premium funding, although the most able make slower progress than other ability groups.
- Not enough pupils, particularly the most able, make more than expected progress in writing from their individual starting points because the work they are given is too easy.
- Pupils learn well when teachers have high expectations about what they will learn and a clear structure is used with plenty of opportunities for them to work things out for themselves and practise their skills. For example, in one session a pupil was engrossed in role play as a doctor using signing as he played.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieve well because teaching is consistently good. The majority successfully settle into the school's routines and are well supported by staff.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teachers do not always sufficiently direct and supervise teaching assistants' work. As a result pupils are allowed to become too reliant on adult support, which restricts their opportunities to learn for themselves and subsequently slows their progress.
- In a number of lessons, it is not made clear to pupils what they should learn. Too frequently, success is related to the completion of an activity rather the quality of what is done. For others, particularly the most able, the level of challenge is sometimes too low and pupils spend too long on tasks such as copying, colouring, cutting or sticking.
- Lesson planning does not always include enough opportunities for pupils, especially the most able, to develop their writing or numeracy skills across the curriculum.
- In some lessons, pupils spend too much time waiting or moving from one activity to another which hinders their learning.
- In mathematics, pupils too rarely work things out for themselves in order to gain confidence in handling numbers to solve problems.
- The teaching of phonics is not consistently good and the gaps in pupils' understanding of letters and the sounds they make are sometimes missed.
- Where learning is most effective, teachers build well on pupils' prior learning and provide a range of activities to support new learning across all subjects. Pupils benefit well in those lessons in which they have exposure to many sensory experiences and practical activities, which they enjoy and from which they learn well.
- Some staff work successfully to enable pupils to understand by using simple words and additional clues, such as signs and symbols, to make their meaning clear. However, this is not

evident in all lessons and where it is not, pupils do not make as much progress in their understanding and in communicating.

- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. It is lively and a wide range of stimulating activities are on offer to children. For example, children were entranced by their ability to move boats across water using a fan.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. This is because pupils' attitudes to learning are not consistently good. Where teaching is not good, pupils lose interest and become restless and less focused, and then do not learn as well as they should.
- The school's systems and policy to promote good behaviour have been reviewed and improved. This is leading to fewer incidents of poor behaviour.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils say they like their school. They are polite, respectful to each other and to adults, and they feel safe and cared for well. Staff provide support to pupils who need some time out of the classroom or need the opportunity to talk with a friendly, sympathetic carer about things that are worrying them.
- Although it is difficult for most pupils to understand about bullying, they are all taught to make choices and express when they do not like an action or activity. Relationships are good and pupils are confident to indicate to staff any unwanted actions from others. Staff are well-tuned to pupils and respond well to pupils' concerns or anxieties.
- Attendance is improving. Most pupils attend well. The attendance of a few pupils is low because of medical conditions.
- Staff show high levels of care and concern for each pupil, and spend considerable time supporting their physical, emotional and social well-being. Relationships with pupils are strong, which helps the staff to be sensitive to small changes in their well-being, and to provide speedy support if necessary.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- There have been several changes in leadership since the last inspection, including defederation from Merlin Top Academy. These have caused instability and slowed the rate and impact of improvement. However, there have been improvements with the appointment of the new headteacher and the formation of the single governing body and, as a result, the school is now in a stronger position to move forward.
- Previously, the process for checking the school's performance was not robust enough and was also too generous. Information on how well pupils were learning was not always accurate in relation to the national expectations for their progress.
- The school's view of itself is now accurate and suitably critical. Plans for future developments are realistic and precise in identifying what still needs to be improved. These plans also set out an ambitious and clear direction for the future, including suitably challenging targets to enhance pupils' progress at all stages
- Following the appointment of the new headteacher, a number of changes were introduced, some of which have already started to improve pupils' learning and progress. In particular, information on how well pupils learn and achieve is now more robust and accurate. However, many of these new initiatives have not yet been fully implemented and, therefore, it is too soon to measure the full impact. However, the early signs are that the quality of teaching is improving.
- Over time, checks made by senior leaders and managers on the quality of teaching have not focused sharply enough on how well different groups of pupils are learning or on resolving weaknesses quickly. As a result, the quality of teaching remains variable

- The headteacher has harnessed the support of the local authority well, and is using external partnerships with local schools very effectively to help raise the quality of teaching. The weakest teaching has been tackled and reduced. This is clear evidence of the effectiveness of the new leaders.
- New subject leaders are now in place, but the skills of these leaders are not yet fully developed to enable them to support other staff effectively and to be able to check closely on the progress of pupils in their subjects. The leader for behaviour has worked effectively to improve this aspect of the school's work.
- There are insufficient opportunities across subjects to develop fully pupils' individual literacy and numeracy skills, especially for the most able. Otherwise, the curriculum broadly meets the needs and abilities of students. A wide range of trips, visits, sporting events, and clubs, promote well pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- All staff are committed to creating equality of opportunity, tackling any discrimination and improving life chances for their pupils. Relationships in school are good.
- Senior leaders have ensured that additional funding has been targeted appropriately so that those pupils supported by the pupil premium achieve at similar levels to their classmates. Effective use of the new primary school sports funding has provided specialist teachers to work with pupils and to provide training for teachers. There is also an increased range of physical activities, including cycling, which have a positive impact on pupils' health, and their physical and mental well-being.
- Safeguarding procedures fully meet requirements.
- A lot of good work has taken place to improve relationships with parents. More parents now attend school events and the school's questionnaires show that they feel comfortable to approach staff about any concerns.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body was reformed following defederation in March 2013 and is a mix of experienced and newly appointed governors.
 - The governing body has an accurate view of the school and rightly describes it as 'work in progress'. Governors are committed and visit the school regularly to make sure they are well informed about its performance; they use this to challenge school leaders when necessary.
 - Governors are knowledgeable about pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching and they understand how good teaching is rewarded and poor performance is tackled. The governing body has made good decisions over the spending of the pupil premium funding and this is having a positive impact on the progress of pupils for whom it is allocated. Governors check this carefully to ensure the best use of the funding and understand the impact of the primary school sports funding on pupils.
 - The governing body has recently undergone a review to enable governors to improve their effectiveness.

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	135227
Local authority	Bradford
Inspection number	431182

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	78
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brent Fitzpatrick
Headteacher	Rachel Stirland
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2011
Telephone number	01535 607038
Fax number	01535 607173
Email address	phxoffice@phoenixschool.org.uk

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