

Phoenix Academy

Brook Farm, Newton Road, North Petherton, Somerset TA6 6NA

Inspection dates

13 June 2019

Overall outcome

The school meets all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraph 3, 3(c), 3(d), 3(g)

- At the school's standard inspection in December 2018, the independent school standard in this paragraph about the quality of education was not met. Leaders, including governors, had not ensured that teaching involved well-planned lessons and effective teaching strategies to provide the support pupils need to make good progress. In addition, teachers were not taking account of pupils' aptitudes, needs and prior attainment when planning lessons. The school's assessment systems were not effective. Teachers were not using assessment information to plan teaching to enable pupils to make progress.
- The headteacher, appointed in November 2018, is now supported by an experienced deputy headteacher, curriculum lead teacher and subject leader with responsibility for science. These leaders identified swiftly that the school's curriculum and assessment systems were ineffective and not enabling teachers to plan lessons to ensure that all pupils make good progress. The school has introduced a new curriculum, supported by schemes of work for all subjects. Pupils have access to a wide range of subjects and study topics which interest and motivate them to learn. For example, during the inspection, pupils were learning about the workings of the human heart. Pupils demonstrated an understanding of the work taught and a willingness to discuss their learning with teachers and the inspector.
- School leaders have introduced strategies to improve teaching and learning across the school. Long-term and medium-term plans set out what is to be taught. Teachers plan weekly lessons, broken down into daily tasks. These plans confirm that teachers now take account of pupils' individual needs, as set out in each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan. Individual pupil risk assessments have been updated and improved to identify behaviour triggers and concerns. This information is also used to plan learning tasks to meet the needs of the pupils. As a result, staff have a greater understanding of the needs of each pupil and plan work which takes account of pupils' aptitudes and needs. Work in pupils' books shows improvement since the introduction of these strategies. For example, teachers are implementing the school's agreed marking and feedback policy more effectively. Pupils receive positive suggestions to improve their

work, which they then act on. Teachers have higher expectations of their pupils, which is resulting in pupils accessing greater challenge and making better progress. In addition, the school's behaviour records show that the number of behaviour incidents is reducing, particularly since the arrival of the new leadership team and the stability now evident in the school.

- Leaders reviewed the school's assessment systems following the standard inspection in December 2018 and found them not fit for purpose. Consequently, they have introduced a new assessment framework which is now implemented by all staff. In February 2019, staff completed a baseline assessment in reading, writing and mathematics for each pupil. Teachers now have an accurate knowledge of the attainment of each pupil. Assessment points are planned three times a year to check pupils' progress. Ongoing assessment and work in pupils' books confirm that teachers have an improving understanding of the current attainment of each pupil. Planning now takes account more precisely of what pupils know, can do and understand. However, although the school's agreed assessment framework is now in place, leaders, including governors, recognise that staff need to implement the framework more consistently to support pupils to make the best progress possible.
- The standard inspection in December 2018 found that pupils' understanding of people with different backgrounds and beliefs to their own was underdeveloped. The headteacher has implemented a planned assembly programme to address this concern. Pupils have learned about Ramadan and Eid. They have also discussed topics such as democracy, equality and diversity to develop their understanding and tolerance of other cultures and beliefs. Pupils engage with positive attitudes in these assemblies. This work is supporting pupils to be better prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders have ensured that this standard is now met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34 (1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b)

- At the school's standard inspection, carried out in December 2018, the independent school standard in this paragraph was not met because governors had not held leaders to account well enough for pupils' progress. They had accepted leaders' overgenerous view of pupils' achievement. Standards relating to the quality of teaching were not met.
- Since the standard inspection in December 2018, there have continued to be changes to the leadership and staffing of the school. Despite this turbulence, leaders now in post have created a staff team that is committed to improving the school and providing a high-quality education for the pupils. Staff acted quickly following the standard inspection, recognising that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment was not good enough. Pupils were not making good progress.
- The rigour of leaders' work is now more evident. The headteacher has raised teachers' expectations and implemented the systems needed to improve the school's performance. The school's revised action plan sets out in detail the actions leaders are taking to make these improvements. For example, the new curriculum is now being implemented across the school. Teachers are using the assessment framework and the information it provides to plan lessons to meet pupils' needs more effectively. The deputy headteacher

has reviewed and improved pupils' individual education plans, behaviour targets and risk assessments. Consequently, leaders have a deeper understanding of pupils' needs and the progress they make.

- Following the departure of the previous leadership team in December 2018, pupils became very unsettled. The number of incidents of poor behaviour increased. The new leadership team has worked together to address pupils' anxieties, improve pupils' engagement with their learning and set clear routines and expectations. The school's information shows that incidents of challenging behaviour are reducing. Pupils' attendance is good. Leaders have identified the importance of consistency of approaches used to manage pupils' behaviour. Governors are now being kept well informed in order to be able to hold leaders to account with rigour.
- Governors accept that they did not have a good understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment at the time of the previous standard inspection. Since this time, the chair of the governing body has insisted that governors are given more precise anonymised information about individual pupils. Governors now visit the school regularly to find out for themselves how well the school is meeting the needs of the pupils. The governing body has been strengthened with the appointment of governors with more relevant and appropriate skills. The headteacher provides monthly reports to the governing body. These reports provide key information to enable governors to challenge and hold leaders to account more effectively. Nonetheless, the chair of the governing body and all governors continue to work with leaders to gain a precise and in-depth understanding of the progress of each pupil and the work of the school to maximise pupils' outcomes.
- The chair of the governing body understands the need to hold leaders to account more robustly. Governors have recently appointed a director of education to support this work and to enable them to check for themselves that pupils make the progress that they are capable of.
- School leaders and those responsible for governance continue to develop their understanding of the independent school standards. The revised action plan, dated 18 March 2019, makes explicit reference to the unmet standards, together with the actions that leaders are now implementing to bring about the improvements needed. Leaders are well on their way to implementing this action plan in full.
- Governors have ensured that the school's safeguarding policy is compliant with the most recent government requirements. It is published on the school's website. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding undertook a safeguarding audit on 30 April 2019. He has a background in social care and, consequently, has the knowledge and experience to undertake this work. Actions identified are followed up to ensure that pupils are safe. The designated officer in Somerset local authority stated during the inspection that the school reports concerns in a timely way. The designated safeguarding lead listens to and acts on advice given. This work demonstrates that leaders give safeguarding a high priority.
- Leaders have ensured that this standard is now met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

The school now meets the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(c) involves well-planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

School details

Unique reference number	135673
DfE registration number	933/6216
Inspection number	10100795

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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	Other independent special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Phoenix Learning and Care Limited
Chair	Jon Pain
Headteacher	Pat Sheridan
Annual fees (day pupils)	£43,268.53
Telephone number	01271 318 110
Website	www.phoenixlearningcare.co.uk
Email address	psheridan@phoenixschools.org.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	11–13 December 2018

Information about this school

- Phoenix Academy is an independent special school. It provides for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, autism spectrum disorder and communication and interaction needs. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher took up post two weeks before the previous standard inspection. A director of education took up post one week ago. New staff have joined the school since December 2018, including a teacher with subject responsibility for science.
- The previous standard inspection took place in December 2018. At that time, the school

was judged to require improvement. A number of independent school standards relating to the quality of education and quality of leadership and management were judged to be unmet.

- The school has a governing body. The chair of the governing body is also the chief executive officer of Phoenix Learning and Care Limited.
- Nearly all pupils are currently in key stage 2.
- The school uses REACH – Alternative Education Provision.
- Pupils access equine studies and horse riding locally. Pupils attend this off-site provision accompanied by school staff.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.
- This inspection was carried out with no notice to the school.
- The school submitted an action plan to the Department for Education (DfE) on 5 February 2019. This plan was judged to be unacceptable. The school submitted an amended action plan to the DfE on 18 March 2019. At the time of this inspection, no response had been received by the school from the DfE. However, the inspection found that the school's action plan is detailed, and leaders are working effectively on implementing the actions set out against the unmet standards.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the teacher with subject responsibility for science and the lead teacher responsible for the curriculum. The inspector met with the chair of the governing body and the newly appointed director of education for Phoenix Learning and Care Limited. She also spoke with pupils and staff informally.
- The inspector visited lessons in a range of subjects and looked at pupils' workbooks. She spoke with pupils at breaktimes.
- The inspector spoke with the designated officer for Somerset. This local authority commissions places for all pupils currently at the school.
- A wide range of documents were examined. These included the school's most recent action plan, the school's curriculum, schemes of work and teachers' planning, records of behaviour and bullying incidents, and safeguarding documents, including the safeguarding audit carried out in April 2019. The inspector also scrutinised the headteacher's reports to governors and documentation provided to governors by school leaders.

Inspection team

Catherine Leahy, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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