

# Inspection of The Phoenix School

Clayton Site, Orton Goldhay, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire PE2 5SD

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Inspection dates: 26–27 September 2019

## **Overall effectiveness**

**Inadequate**

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The quality of education

**Inadequate**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Inadequate**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Inadequate**

Early years provision

**Inadequate**

Sixth-form provision

**Inadequate**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Staff help pupils with their personal and healthcare needs from the moment they arrive at school. Parents and carers told inspectors how much they value the support that is offered to them. They recognise that this is a school that should help their child learn and grow in independence. However, this has not been the case for some time. The quality of education is not good enough to ensure that the school meets pupils' profound special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Attendance is too low and, in the past, this has not been challenged. Furthermore, governors have not ensured that the necessary procedures for keeping pupils safe have been in place.

Teachers do not make the best use of time in lessons. Pupils spend too long waiting to start or move on with their learning. There is little structure or purpose to their learning across many curriculum subjects. Teachers do not use pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans effectively to plan learning. Pupils are not learning essential skills over a long period of time that help them become more prepared for adult life after school.

Many staff have good and positive relationships with pupils. Staff work hard to ensure that pupils are well cared for. Many staff help pupils develop their physical skills. For example, the hydrotherapy pool and extensive equipment in the playground are used regularly. Staff are diligent in the lower school, helping pupils with eating and playing at lunchtimes. Pupils' successes are nicely celebrated during assemblies.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

The quality of education pupils receive is poor. Too many pupils throughout the school experience disconnected activities rather than a well-designed and coherent curriculum. Teachers do not take account of pupils' individual needs and targets from their EHC plans. Furthermore, these plans are not of a good enough quality.

Adults have not been given sufficient training to adapt the curriculum. They do not provide carefully considered learning activities to help pupils make small but important steps of progress. Adults' expectations of what pupils can achieve in mathematics are too low. This is also the case in phonics. Pupils complete the same activities, even if the task is too easy. Teachers' subject knowledge is too variable.

Teachers do not make the best use of teaching assistants' skills and knowledge. Teaching assistants are diligent when it comes to supporting pupils' healthcare needs. However, in many classes, teaching assistants are not directed sufficiently to help pupils learn as they should.

The new senior leaders have set about making necessary improvements. They have created a better curriculum. It lays out what pupils need to learn more clearly. However, the curriculum is very new and has not had time to have the impact that

leaders intend. Adults still need to implement leaders' expectations.

In the past, leaders have not trained staff well enough to manage pupils' behaviour. There are too many different systems for recording incidents at school. This means that leaders cannot effectively analyse what is working well and what needs to change. The headteacher is fully aware that systems and procedures need updating and improving.

A significant minority of pupils do not attend school as often as they should. Pupils' absences are sometimes due to extended holidays that have been previously accepted as the norm. However, where there are absences due to pupils' medical needs, leaders work well with parents to continue to provide educational support.

Pupils' breaktimes are not used well. Leaders have designated these times for adults to sit and talk with pupils to help them with their communication. But adults do not use the time as intended. Some take too long with breaks, which results in lessons starting late. Some pupils are not spoken with and there is a lack of purpose in too many classes during this time. Pupils are compliant and wait patiently for adults, even when lessons are delayed or when there are limited resources available.

Leaders and teachers cater for some aspects for pupils' personal development successfully. For example, in the sixth form, students develop independence skills by attending the local 'hub', where teachers provide challenging work opportunities in the shop. However, generally in the sixth form, adults have not used assessment information appropriately to design a meaningful curriculum. This academic year, leaders are providing more students with the opportunity to take part in residential trips. Leaders are now working closely with local colleges that students will attend after leaving school. This work is in the very early stages of development.

Provision in the early years is poor. Children are presented with a jumbled series of activities. Consequently, children are not prepared well enough for Year 1. Often, lessons lack purpose and are not meeting children's academic needs. There is a lack of urgency in delivering the curriculum. Lessons start late. Adults do not take opportunities to read to children or encourage communication. Staff have not developed a positive culture of reading.

The headteacher and new leaders have accurately identified the strengths and long-standing weaknesses at the school. Teachers confirm that leaders have included them in the design of the new curriculum and listened to their views. Leaders consider staff workload appropriately. The many necessary changes this academic year have affected staff morale. However, most staff are fully behind the changes and know that the quality of education needs to improve. Staff want pupils to achieve as well as they can.

The local authority is now providing extensive support to governors and school leaders. One adult summed up the feeling of many, saying, 'We are at least five years behind and we need to catch up quickly.' Many of the management systems have not been fit for purpose for a long time.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Governors have not managed the recruitment of staff well enough. Too many staff have not had the necessary checks to show their suitability to work with children and young people. Records of staff recruitment are disorganised and many checks are missing. The current headteacher is now working with the local authority to rectify historically weak recruitment procedures.

Leaders are taking effective action when serious incidents are reported. The headteacher keeps the needs and welfare of all pupils at the forefront of any safeguarding decisions. This has not always been the case. Previously, there was a culture where poor safeguarding practices were accepted. This year, leaders have introduced new systems for identifying child protection concerns. Previous child protection records were insufficient and poorly kept.

Staff have not received appropriate training. Leaders are planning a full review of all safeguarding training, processes and procedures.

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

#### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Safeguarding procedures and processes for the recruitment of staff have not been rigorous and robust for some time. New staff who have been employed have not been correctly checked in line with statutory expectations. Leaders need external support from the local authority to review all procedures and ensure that appropriate checks have been made. The training of staff needs to be prioritised. Leaders need to regularly review the quality of child protection practices to continue to improve the safeguarding culture.
- The curriculum that leaders have designed is very new. Curriculum plans are not established. Leaders need to make sure that there are appropriate plans in place for all subjects. Leaders need to ensure that these are adhered to by all teachers.
- The use of pupils' EHC plans is not good enough. Too many teachers do not plan for what each pupil needs to learn. Pupils do not make the steps of progress that they should. Leaders know that the quality of the EHC plans is not suitable. They now need to make sure that the quality improves rapidly. Leaders need to ensure that pupils receive the best-quality provision that meets pupils' needs.
- Governors are not effective. They need to review their own practices. They need to provide appropriate challenge and support to the school to ensure that the quality of education and the safeguarding of pupils are of good quality.
- Too many teachers and support staff do not have the necessary training to help pupils with profound SEND learn well. More specialist training is required for staff. More appropriate resources are required for pupils to access learning activities at

their level.

- There are too many different systems for recording behaviour and welfare incidents, including where a member of staff has needed to physically intervene. Leaders cannot analyse these well to see what is working and what needs to change for a pupil. Leaders have changed the behaviour policy. Staff need to follow the newly agreed approaches.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

|   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>                    | 134272               |
| <b>Local authority</b>                            | Peterborough         |
| <b>Inspection number</b>                          | 10120947             |
| <b>Type of school</b>                             | Special              |
| <b>School category</b>                            | Community special    |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                        | 2 to 19              |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                           | Mixed                |
| <b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>   | Mixed                |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>        | 153                  |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b> | 18                   |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                      | The governing body   |
| <b>Chair of governing body</b>                    | Brian Woolley        |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                                | Charlotte Whysall    |
| <b>Website</b>                                    | No website currently |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                | 17 June 2016         |

## Information about this school

- The current headteacher commenced employment in September 2018, following the retirement of the previous long-standing headteacher. Leadership has changed at all levels across the school.
- The school provides education for pupils with profound SEND. All pupils have an EHC plan.

## Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons

responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- Inspectors visited classes in a range of subjects. We looked in detail at reading, mathematics, personal, social and health education and creative learning, with a focus on music.
- We observed pupils interacting with adults in lessons and considered the work pupils produced. We spoke with teachers and support staff about different aspects of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, senior leaders and curriculum leaders. We met with two representatives from the local authority. A meeting was held with the chair of governors and representatives of the governing body.
- We reviewed a wide range of documentation, including safeguarding records, including the single central register. We considered behaviour records, attendance information and information regarding the use of physical intervention.
- Inspectors spoke directly with a number of parents to gather their views of the school.

### **Inspection team**

Kim Hall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sally Garrett

Ofsted Inspector

Russell Ayling

Ofsted Inspector

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