

Inspection of Phoenix U16 Independent School

Unit E, Metro Business Park, Clough Street, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST1 4AF

Inspection dates: 9 to 11 November 2021

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous
inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent
school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel safe at school. However, at lunchtime pupils are not supervised adequately. This puts them at risk of harm. In addition, record-keeping is not organised well nor securely stored. As a result, pupils are at risk of not receiving the right help at the right time.

This is a happy school. Staff care about pupils and warmly welcome them into school each day. Pupils feel valued, enjoy attending and grow in confidence over time. Staff want pupils to do well. They are determined that pupils gain the knowledge and skills so that they can be successful.

Staff expect pupils to behave well. They get to know each pupil so that they can help them meet these expectations. In lessons, staff are quick to acknowledge and praise pupils' efforts. If pupils struggle to manage their behaviour, staff support them with calmness and kindness. This is founded on an atmosphere of mutual respect. Pupils say that this helps them to improve. All are proud to be part of the school.

Staff do not tolerate bullying or discriminatory language, and neither do pupils. Staff address issues promptly so that they do not escalate.

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

Leaders have thought carefully about the curriculum. They have chosen a suitable range of qualifications for pupils to study. They have designed the curriculum so that pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training. Leaders have made sure that reading is at the heart of their plans. They provide support for pupils who need extra help with their reading. In addition, pupils benefit from a wider curriculum that goes beyond academic study. This helps pupils raise their own expectations of what they can achieve.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils' learning. Within subjects, leaders have developed detailed plans of what pupils should learn. They have ordered learning sequentially. This means that each lesson builds on the previous one. Leaders have supplemented these plans with a range of appropriate resources. Teachers use these well to present new learning clearly to pupils.

Many pupils have substantial gaps in their learning. These often come to the fore when pupils are trying to learn new things. Teachers identify these gaps by constantly checking pupils' learning in lessons. They then use this knowledge to inform their teaching. However, this is not consistently the case. In some instances, teachers continue to teach pupils the planned curriculum instead of addressing gaps in pupils' knowledge. As a result, pupils get lost in their learning and become confused.

Leaders have planned an ambitious personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. Pupils learn about a wide range of issues, from healthy eating to knife crime. Staff teach this content in a sensitive manner. They challenge pupils' views and encourage pupils to be empathetic to others. As part of the PSHE curriculum, pupils receive up-to-date and relevant information about careers. This helps pupils to see a purpose in what they are learning and raise their aspirations. Pupils listen to staff and to each other respectfully. There is an inclusive culture in the school. Leaders continue to develop this. They have introduced further sessions to help pupils' personal development. In these sessions, pupils discuss moral dilemmas and think about how they would manage difficult situations. Leaders now want to focus more on pupils' mental health and further develop links with families. They have already appointed new staff to specifically focus on these issues.

Many pupils join the school with a poor record of attendance. Leaders address this immediately. They expect pupils to be on time and attend well. Staff work tirelessly to improve pupils' attendance. First and foremost, they have made school a place where pupils want to be. Every morning, staff greet each pupil, welcome them into school and provide them with breakfast. Leaders monitor attendance carefully. They use this information unstintingly to follow up poor attendance. Despite the challenges caused by the pandemic, their work is successful.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive. This is a direct result of the culture in the school. One pupil told inspectors, 'Teachers actually care. They want you to do well.' Staff monitor pupils' behaviour lesson by lesson. If pupils' behaviour falls below the level expected, staff use 'turnaround time'. In this, staff address issues and restate expectations. As a result, pupils return swiftly to lessons so that they can continue learning.

The proprietor knows what they need to do to improve the quality of education at the school. They have clear plans in place to develop leaders' knowledge and skills. These are coherent and organised.

Staff enjoy working at the school. Leaders are conscious of staff workload and well-being. They value staff and appreciate their dedication and hard work. All staff are proud of the support pupils receive. The proprietor has made sure that staff are well-trained to teach their subject. Leaders encourage staff to complete further professional development.

Leaders have not ensured that all the independent school standards are consistently met. This particularly applies to the physical environment of the school. During the inspection, leaders took action to rectify some issues. For instance, adding wash facilities and replacing the bed in the medical room. However, other issues remain. For instance, pupils do not have sufficient outside space to socialise, exterior lighting is poor and gas safety checks are overdue. Doors labelled as fire exits are fastened so that only staff can open them.

Leaders were not able to provide inspectors with all the information requested in relation to the inspection. For instance, they could not provide a list of referrals

made by staff to the designated safeguarding lead. As a result, inspectors were unable to check that leaders were taking relevant action to address concerns.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders have ensured that an up-to-date and suitable policy is available on the school website.

At lunchtime, leaders allow pupils off site. During this time, staff do not supervise pupils at all, and there is no record of when pupils leave and return. Pupils are, therefore, at risk.

Leaders provide staff with training as part of their induction. However, staff training is not updated and annually refreshed. In addition, leaders are not sufficiently vigilant in making sure that their own training is up to date.

Staff's concerns and any decisions made are not always recorded in writing. Leaders do not store information securely in an organised way. As a result, it is difficult for leaders to ensure that they monitor actions to ensure that they are resolved.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and the proprietor)

- In some instances, teachers continue to try and deliver curriculum plans when pupils do not have the required prior knowledge. This means that pupils do not learn the intended curriculum. Leaders should ensure that teachers respond and adapt their teaching to address gaps in pupils' knowledge so that pupils are not building new learning on shaky ground.
- Pupils are not adequately supervised during certain parts of the day. This means that leaders do not know if they are safe. Leaders should ensure that pupils are always supervised properly so that they are not at risk of harm.
- Leaders do not keep records of safeguarding in a secure and effective way. Staff do not always record concerns relating to a child that they have reported verbally. This means that there is a risk of pupils not receiving the right help at the right time. Leaders should ensure that all concerns, discussions and decisions are recorded in writing and stored securely.
- Staff training on safeguarding is provided to staff as part of their induction. However, training is not refreshed and updated to ensure that staff know and understand their responsibilities. Leaders should ensure that safeguarding training is revisited and considers the latest guidance.
- The proprietor and leaders have not made sure that all the independent school standards are consistently met. Therefore, some aspects of the physical environment in which staff work and pupils learn are not suitable. Leaders should

ensure that they make the necessary improvements to the physical environment so that all the standards are met consistently and continually over time.

- Some exits labelled as fire exits require a code to unlock them. This means that pupils and visitors cannot escape via these exits points in an emergency without a member of staff. Leaders should ensure that all fire exits can be opened by anyone needing to escape.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	137892
DfE registration number	861/6007
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10209043
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	24
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Shelley Jamieson
Headteacher	Shelley Jamieson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£18,050
Telephone number	01782 922 306
Website	www.phoenixlearning.co.uk
Email address	sjamieson@phoenixlearning.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	23 to 25 January 2018

Information about this school

- Phoenix U16 Independent School provides full-time education for pupils between the ages of 14 and 16. Of the pupils registered, some are dual registered with other education providers.
- The school operates from a converted warehouse unit on a business park in the Hanley area of Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire.
- Pupils are referred to the school by local secondary schools.
- Pupils attending Phoenix U16 typically have a range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and have either been excluded or at risk of exclusion from their previous setting.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

- During the inspection, inspectors held discussions with the proprietor, who is also the headteacher, and other leaders.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in mathematics, English, art and PSHE. For each of these subjects, inspectors met with subject leaders, carried out visits to lessons, spoke to pupils and looked at some of their work.
- Inspectors also visited sport, and health and social care, lessons.
- Inspectors met with members of staff individually and in a group and spoke to pupils formally and informally at various points during the inspection.
- Inspectors looked at records relating to behaviour, bullying, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding arrangements by checking the school's approach to staff recruitment, scrutinising policy documents and meeting with the designated safeguarding lead.
- Inspectors toured the school premises to check their suitability.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff. There were no parent free-text comments and no responses to Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Ian Tustian, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mike Onyon

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 12 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005[12].
- 14 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that pupils are properly supervised through the appropriate deployment of school staff.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 23(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2), the standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that outdoor space is provided in order to enable–
 - 23(1)(a) suitable toilet and washing facilities are provided for the sole use of pupils.
- 25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.
- 27 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 27(b) external lighting is provided in order to ensure that people can safely enter and leave the school premises.
- 29(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable outdoor space is provided in order to enable–
 - 29(1)(b) pupils to play outside.

Part 6. Provision of information

- 32(1) The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 32(1)(g) any information reasonably requested in connection with an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act which is required for the purposes of the inspection is provided to the body conducting the inspection and that body is given access to the school's admission and attendance registers.

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; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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