

Inspection of PhoenixPlace

Redcar Street, Camberwell, London SE5 0NA

Inspection dates: 22 to 24 November 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

'Nurturing' and 'caring' are two words that describe PhoenixPlace well. Pupils receive high-quality pastoral support right from day 1 of starting at the school. This includes access to counselling, mentoring and other therapeutic support. Leaders put a lot of emphasis on building up pupils' confidence and self-esteem.

Pupils speak positively about their experience of life at school. They say that they benefit from small-group teaching and that staff take their time to explain things to them. Parents and carers speak positively about the school. They say that staff help put a smile back on the faces of their children.

Leaders have high expectations for behaviour. Adults make sure that the school is a calm environment. Staff do not shout or raise their voices. Pupils are expected to be polite and respectful. They are taught about different types of discrimination. Bullying in any form is not tolerated. Pupils are kept safe and are well looked after.

Leaders have not ensured that they follow statutory guidance in planning and delivering relationships and sex education (RSE). This limits the breadth and depth of the personal development programme.

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

Pupils often start at the school after having been out of education for a long time. They have significant gaps in their learning, particularly in English and mathematics. Leaders use effective ways to find out where the gaps are. They use this information to successfully adapt the curriculum to meet pupils' individual needs. In mathematics, for example, staff make sure that pupils learn and practise the basics before they move on to more difficult work. In English, pupils become confident writers, writing at length with improved grammar and spelling. Leaders also support pupils with their reading, helping them to access and understand different texts, for example. Pupils also read aloud across the curriculum to help build their confidence.

Leaders make sure that pupils study a broad range of subjects. Some pupils join the school at the end of Year 10 or the beginning of Year 11. Staff offer flexible pathways to make sure that pupils can access courses that meet their needs, for example GCSE English or functional skills. This helps pupils to gain a range of qualifications to support them when the time comes to leave school.

Leaders have made sure that the curriculum in most subjects is well thought through and that subject content is taught in a logical order. In a few subjects, leaders have not broken down what they want pupils to learn with enough precision. When this happens, it makes it harder for teachers to know the most important content that they need their pupils to know and remember.

Leaders make sure that staff know their pupils' needs. Education, health and care (EHC) plans are used to help create 'pen pictures' that give staff the summary

information they need to understand each pupil's needs and to adapt their teaching. Most pupils who attend the school for short-term placements successfully return to their mainstream school.

Teachers know their subjects well. They take their time to explain things to pupils. When pupils lack motivation to take part in activities, they encourage participation. In physical education (PE) for example, once pupils get involved, teaching then carefully emphasises and models the relevant techniques that pupils need to know. Time is also taken to weave mathematics into PE to help pupils apply their numeracy knowledge. Teachers generally use assessment well. However, sometimes the quality of direct feedback and checking of what pupils have understood is variable.

Leaders prepare pupils for adulthood effectively. Careers education is planned and delivered well. Younger pupils explore different jobs and industries. Older pupils benefit from a unit qualification where they learn about writing a curriculum vitae, application forms and interviews. Leaders work with colleges to organise visits. Leaders put a lot of effort into making sure that pupils have a suitable course for study after Year 11.

Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning and take pride in their work. Staff know pupils' individual 'triggers' and how to prevent small issues from turning into something more serious. As a result, staff manage behaviour well so that the focus remains on learning. For some pupils, their attendance improves over time. However, persistent absence is still too high.

Leaders have established a personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum. Pupils learn about the range of protected characteristics. Topics such as exploitation and peer pressure are handled sensitively. However, leaders have not ensured that they cover the depth and breadth of the Department for Education (DfE) guidance on RSE across the curriculum. They have not met the requirements of the independent school standards (the standards) in relation to RSE, for example in consulting parents and finalising the school policy. Pupils' cultural development, such as learning about different cultures and religions, is not embedded.

Staff enjoy working at the school. They feel well supported by leaders in all aspects of school life. The strategic advisory panel that works with the school is supportive. Its members have a range of skills in finance and business that help the proprietor. That said, sometimes there is a specific lack of expertise in checking on aspects of the school's work, for example in relation to the standards.

The school meet the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders gather a range of information to make sure that they know the risks that may be affecting their pupils. They use this information well, for example in deciding

on the support each pupil will receive. Leaders work well with external agencies to keep pupils safe. They take decisions that are in the best interests of pupils.

Leaders teach pupils how to stay safe, exploring topics such as harmful sexual behaviours, peer pressure and substance misuse. They work effectively with the safer schools police officer, who is also involved in delivering safety workshops. Pupils feel safe at school. They say that adults are there for them and listen to their worries or concerns.

The safeguarding policy meets the requirements of statutory guidance and is available on the school's website.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In a few subjects, leaders have not been explicit in identifying the precise knowledge and vocabulary that they want pupils to learn. This makes it harder for teachers to sharply focus on specific content when preparing activities and planning delivery of the intended curriculum. Leaders should provide further training for staff to ensure consistency in curriculum thinking across all subjects.
- At times, the quality of teachers' direct feedback and checks on pupils' learning can vary. When this happens, pupils are not helped to embed important knowledge in their long-term memory. Leaders should help staff improve how they use assessment to check on pupils' understanding and to give clear, direct feedback.
- The level of persistent absence is too high. When this is the case, pupils miss out on vital learning. Leaders should review their strategies to reduce persistent absence.
- The curriculum for RSE and pupils' personal development lacks depth. Pupils are not taught the broad range of content they should be in an age-appropriate way. Curriculum thinking in relation to pupils' cultural development needs more detailed coordination. Leaders should review their curriculum thinking for RSE and cultural development, including how and when it is taught across all sections of the school. Leaders must also consult parents as required and publish their final policy for RSE as outlined in the standards.
- Leaders have not met the standards in relation to RSE. Leaders must keep up to date with any changes/requirements to the standards. The proprietor should find ways of assuring themselves that the standards are being consistently met.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	141701
DfE registration number	210/6007
Local authority	Southwark
Inspection number	10242785
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent Special School
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	21
Number of part-time pupils	Fewer than 5
Proprietor	Sophie Nelson
Chair	Linda Carmody
Headteacher	Sophie Nelson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£42,900 to £79,000
Telephone number	0207 7037 189
Website	www.phoenixplace.co.uk
Email address	info@phoenixplace.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	12 to 14 June 2018

Information about this school

- The school's last inspection was in June 2018, when it was judged to be good and all the independent school standards were met.
- The school occupies the building of the Brandon Baptist Church in Southwark.
- Most pupils have EHC plans for social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Pupils join the school at different times during the year. Some pupils stay at the school for short-term placements before returning to their mainstream school.
- Pupil access some of their PE curriculum at Camberwell Leisure Centre, London SE5 8TS, which has changing and shower facilities.
- 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.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior staff. The lead inspector also met with representatives of the strategic advisory panel, including the chair.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, PE and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons and spoke to teachers and pupils about their learning. Inspectors reviewed samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also spoke to staff and looked at pupils' work in other subjects.
- Inspectors met with leaders with responsibility for safeguarding and behaviour. They reviewed a range of documentation, including pre-employment checks on staff, case studies and attendance information. Inspectors also considered the views of parents, staff and pupils when evaluating the school's safeguarding arrangements. The lead inspector also held telephone meetings with representatives from two local authorities and met with the safer schools police officer.
- Inspectors considered replies to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and the online surveys for staff and pupils. The lead inspector also met with a few parents.

Inspection team

Sam Hainey, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sahreen Siddiqui

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor–
 - 2A(1)(b) ensures that every registered pupil who is provided with secondary education at the school is provided with relationships and sex education, except in so far as the pupil is excused as mentioned in sub-paragraph (2),
 - 2A(1)(d) in making arrangements for the purposes of paragraphs (a), (b) or (c), has regard to any guidance under section 80A of the Education Act 2002 that applies in relation to the provision of education by maintained schools,
 - 2A(1)(e) makes and keeps up to date a separate written statement of its policy with regard to the provision of education as required by each of paragraphs (a) and (b),
 - 2A(1)(f) consults parents of registered pupils at the school before making or revising a statement under sub-paragraph (e), and
 - 2A(1)(g) publishes a copy of the statement on a website and provides a copy of the statement free of charge to anyone who asks for one.
- 2A(2) Arrangements made by the proprietor for the purposes of sub-paragraph (1)(b) must ensure that where a pupil’s parent requests that the pupil is wholly or partly excused from sex education provided as part of relationships and sex education, the pupil is so excused until the request is withdrawn, unless or to the extent that the head teacher considers that the pupil should not be so excused.

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.

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