

Inspection of Petherton Park School

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

Inspection dates: 7 to 9 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Many pupils who arrive at Petherton Park have missed out on education for long periods of time. Careful thought has gone into the design of the vocational and therapeutic offer. However, in some academic subjects, it is unclear how pupils build their knowledge and understanding, including in reading.

Staff spend time getting to know pupils' individual needs when they join. This personalised approach is a strength of the school. Relationships between staff and pupils are typically warm and positive. It contributes to pupils feeling safe. Pupils enjoy the fresh start the school provides. Attendance is high.

Pupils' behaviour improves the longer they are in school. They become calmer and able to control their emotions. Nonetheless, a small minority of pupils show challenging behaviour. Some staff do not apply the agreed strategies when dealing with this.

Pupils enjoy enrichment activities such as paddleboarding and trampolining. These help to develop their resilience. However, the school is still working out the best way to build pupils' leadership skills.

The school works closely with parents. The majority are delighted with the school. Positive comments include how their children are gaining life skills, making friends and re-engaging with learning.

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

Much of the school has changed since the previous inspection. The number of pupils attending the school has doubled. Pupils' needs have also changed. A new headteacher and deputy headteacher recently took up post. They have made a positive start in revising the curriculum to meet these changing needs. Leaders know what to do to bring about improvement. However, many initiatives are at an early stage. The school recognises that there is still more work to be done to ensure that pupils benefit from a high-quality education in all subjects.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school prioritises pupils' social and emotional development when they first arrive. Pupils follow personalised 'pathway plans' based on their education, health and care plan (ECH plan) targets. Well-trained specialist staff provide bespoke programmes, such as music and speech and language therapy, to meet pupils' needs on a day-to-day basis. They use a range of assessments to track and evaluate progress and to inform pupils' next steps. This approach helps most pupils re-engage with their learning successfully.

Pupils study a broad curriculum. In mathematics and vocational subjects, staff demonstrate secure subject knowledge. They take every opportunity to weave basic skills into lessons. For example, in woodwork, pupils use their knowledge of

measurement to prepare wood for cutting. Staff break down knowledge into small, manageable steps. Learning builds on what pupils have been taught before. This helps pupils complete more complex tasks. Nonetheless, in some subjects, the school has not identified or sequenced the knowledge that pupils need to learn in the same logical way. This slows the progress pupils make through the curriculum.

The school has recently introduced a new English scheme of work. Staff thread spelling, grammar and vocabulary throughout lessons. They select reading materials that interest and engage pupils. However, the culture of reading is not well developed. There are too few chances for pupils to read across the curriculum. Some of the weakest readers do not get enough practice reading books. This prevents them from developing into confident and fluent readers.

The school provides a range of meaningful experiences to nurture pupils' wider skills. These are earmarked on pupils' individual timetables. Food and design technology are firm favourites. Pupils develop a secure understanding of nutrition and healthy lifestyles. They learn to follow recipes and use knives and tools safely. Pupils take pride in the projects they complete. These experiences equip pupils with valuable life skills.

The school increases pupils' understanding of the world around them. Pupils are respectful of differences and know why it is wrong to use derogatory language. The enrichment programme is growing. Pupils can choose activities that develop their interests. For example, some pupils learn a musical instrument while others visit an animal centre to understand what it is like working with animals. Pupils receive independent careers advice. All pupils move on to relevant college courses when they leave the school. However, opportunities for work experience are limited, and pupils would like the chance to take on roles of responsibility across the school.

Most staff have high expectations of pupils' conduct and behaviour. High staff ratios mean that pupils get lots of individual support. Pupils are generally productive in lessons. They interact with each other and staff positively. The school trains staff on ways to support pupils who need help to regulate their behaviour. However, at times, some staff do not follow the agreed approaches. For example, poor language often goes unchallenged. The school has firm plans in place to enhance training and expertise, especially for newer staff members.

Staff work as a united team. They value the ongoing training programme provided by the therapy team and proprietor. All staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire said they were proud to work at the school.

The operations director for education and the proprietor know what is working well and what needs to be improved. They have the expertise to support and challenge the school. However, they do not have a sharp enough oversight of how well changes to the curriculum are implemented. The proprietor meets the independent school standards in full. They comply with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- There is a lack of oversight of how well pupils learn the curriculum. This means that some weaknesses are not picked up quickly enough. The proprietor and school should ensure that rigorous systems are in place to check the effectiveness of the curriculum and its impact on pupils' learning.
- The school has not embedded a culture of reading. It does not provide enough opportunities to develop pupils' reading across the curriculum. This prevents some pupils from building their confidence and fluency. The school should seek to provide increased opportunities to broaden pupils' reading experiences across all subjects.
- In some subjects, the school has not identified or sequenced the knowledge that pupils need to learn in a logical way. This makes it difficult for pupils to build up a rich body of knowledge over time. The school must identify the important knowledge that pupils need to learn in all subjects and ensure that it is well sequenced and implemented by all staff.
- Some staff do not apply the school's systems to manage pupils' behaviour. This means that challenging behaviour is not always dealt with effectively. The school should ensure that staff use the behaviour policy as intended.
- Pupils have limited opportunities for work experience and to take on responsibilities across the school. This limits the chances for pupils to develop independence and confidence for future learning and employment. The school should provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills and engage with the world of work.

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	135673
DfE registration number	933/6216
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10286417
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Phoenix Childcare Limited
Chair	Jonathan Pain
Headteacher	Sam Williams
Annual fees (day pupils)	£55,714 to £86,315
Telephone number	0330 135 8200
Website	www.phoenixschools.org.uk/petherton
Email address	petherton@phoenixschools.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	18 to 20 January 2022

Information about this school

- Petherton Park School is an independent special school. The school caters for pupils with a range of SEND. These include social, emotional and mental health needs and autism spectrum disorder. The school is one of several independent special schools run by the proprietor.
- All pupils who attend the school have an EHC plan. Three local authorities fund these places.
- The school is registered for 16 pupils between the ages of seven and 16 years. Currently, there are no pupils in key stage 2.
- There have been changes to the leadership of the school since the previous standard inspection. A new headteacher and deputy headteacher took up post in September 2023.
- The school does not currently 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 meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, other school staff and the regional education lead to discuss aspects of the school's work. Inspectors also met with the chair of the proprietor body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English (including early reading), mathematics, physical education and music. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about some other subjects, including science and personal, social and health education.
- An inspector listened to pupils from key stage 3 read to an adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and

considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

- Inspectors conducted a range of activities to confirm whether the independent school standards were met in full. This included health and safety checks of the premises, risk assessments, record-keeping for behaviour management, attendance and supervision during social times.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View. An inspector spoke to parents on the telephone.

Inspection team

Dale Burr, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jason Edge

His Majesty's Inspector

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